



universität
wien

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

„Considering Context: On the Past of Contemporary Arab
Political Theater“

verfasst von / submitted by

Yara Alhaj Ali, BA

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2023 / Vienna 2023

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

UA 066 583

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Theater-, Film-
und Medienwissenschaft

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Mag. Dr. Birgit Peter, Privatdoz.

Anti-Plagiats-Klausel.

Ich erkläre hiermit, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbständig und ohne Benutzung anderer als der angegebenen Hilfsmittel angefertigt habe. Die aus fremden Quellen direkt oder indirekt übernommenen Gedanken sind als solche kenntlich gemacht.

Wien, 2023 / Vienna 2023

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive script that appears to be 'L. A.' followed by a horizontal line.

Weitere Anmerkungen zur Zitierweise.

1. Die Zitierweise richtet sich nach dem vom Institut für Theater-, Film- und Medienwissenschaft herausgegebenen *Handbuch. Wissenschaftliches Arbeiten* (<http://phaidra.univie.ac.at/o:1047915>, 11. 03. 2023).
2. Sämtliche Hervorhebungen in direkten Zitaten sind als solche aus den Originalmaterialien übernommen worden. Übersetzungen durch den Autor der vorliegenden Arbeit sind mit dem Zusatz [Trans. Y. A.] gekennzeichnet.
3. Literatur- und Materialverweise im Fließtext sind nach deren erster Nennung in den Fußnoten durch die Verwendung einer Kurzzitierweise der folgenden Art gekennzeichnet:

Name(n), Erscheinungsjahr, Seitenzahl.

Die ausführlichen bibliographischen Angaben sind im Literaturverzeichnis (Kapitel 9) der Arbeit vermerkt.

“We are not of today or yesterday, we are of an immense age”.

Carl Gustav Jung

Contents

1. Arabic Political Theater Between the Middle East and Europe.....	1
1.1 Research question and objectives.....	2
1.2 Theoretical landscape and state of research.....	3
1.2.1 The geographical scope of the term “Arabic” as used in this study.....	8
2. The Seeds of Arabic Satire.....	10
2.1 Ibn Daniyal and the medieval shadow play.....	11
2.1.1 Scenes of the Cairene underground.....	13
2.1.2 Censorship throughout the centuries.....	16
2.1.3 Highly subversive, almost religious.....	17
2.2 Relevance and status today.....	19
3. Arabic Operetta Between Conservatives and Colonists.....	21
3.1 Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani and the Damascene fundamentalists.....	23
3.2 Arabic theater in a European Egypt.....	26
3.3 Al-Qabbani’s impact and the endurance of his message.....	29
4. Oriental Muses and Their Rebellious Offspring.....	31
5. The Sociopolitical and the Politicized (1960–1980).....	40
5.1 Saadallah Wannous: Experimental theater, traditional threads.....	42
5.2 Syrian political cabaret and drama: Theater of Thorns and the October Troupe.....	46
5.3 Al-Rahbani Family.....	53
5.3.1 Ziad Al-Rahbani’s popular avantgarde.....	55
6. Conclusion: Value Generating Patterns in Arabic Political Theater as Guide and Context for Contemporary Theatrical Endeavors.....	59
7. Appendix.....	63
7.1 Figures for chapter 3.1 (Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani and the Damascene fundamentalists)	63
7.2 Figures for chapter 3.2 (Arabic theater in a European Egypt).....	65

7.3 Figures for chapter 4 (Oriental Muses and Their Rebellious Offspring).....	66
7.4 Figures for chapter 5.2 (Syrian political cabaret and drama: Theater of Thorns and the October Troupe).....	69
7.5 Figures for chapter 5.3 (Al-Rahbani Family).....	70
7.6 Figures for chapter 5.3.1 (Ziad Al-Rahbani's popular avantgarde).....	71
8. Abstracts.....	72
8.1 Abstract der Masterarbeit in deutscher Sprache.....	72
8.2 Abstract of the Master's Thesis in English.....	72
9. Sources.....	73
9.1 Monographs.....	73
9.2 Anthologies.....	77
9.3 Articles and essays.....	77
9.4 Theses.....	80
9.5 Film.....	81
9.6 Compact disc.....	81
9.7 Online sources.....	81
9.8 Photo sources and credits.....	84

List of Figures

Figure 1: Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani, father of Syrian theater.....	63
Figure 2: Damascus Palace in Midway Plaisance 1893.....	64
Figure 3: Théâtre Zizinia, La Scala of Alexandria.....	65
Figure 4: Esthera (Tirah) Al Hakim, Chicago World's Fair 1893.....	66
Figure 5: Munira El Mahdeya with musicians c. 1915.....	67
Figure 6: Badia Masabni posing as an odalisque, Cairo, 1960.....	68
Figure 7: Actress and belly dancer Tahiya Carioca c. 1935.....	68
Figure 8: Usrat Tishreen in <i>Ghurba</i> (Expatriation), Damascus 1975.....	69
Figure 9: Asi Al-Rahbani and Fairouz with Charles Aznavour, Beirut 1971.....	70
Figure 10: <i>Jebal Asswan</i> play (Fairouz, Brothers Rahbani), Baalbeck 1969.....	70
Figure 11: Ziad Al-Rahbani Live in De Doelen, Rotterdam 2019.....	71

1. Arabic Political Theater between the Middle East and Europe

“One of the longest continually inhabited parts of the world, the Middle Eastern land that is now called Syria—and more specifically its capital, Damascus—can trace its history back to approximately 5000 B.C. [...]. As a land bridge between Europe and Asia, Syria was a common historical stopping ground. Remnants of Phoenician, Assyrian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Babylonian and Ottoman empires are scattered across the country in impressive ruins too numerous to mention by name. Indeed, some of them are ancient theatres. Even before the appearance of Roman colonists, Syria had its own performative events. The roots of Syrian performance can be found, as in Egypt and many other Arab countries, in storytelling and, to some extent, in shadow theatre”.¹

Ghassan Al-Maleh, Syrian theatre critic and co-founder of The Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus writes. “A long and uninterrupted line of drama can thus be seen to extend over several centuries”, Egyptian scholar and critic Ali Al-Rai observes, “and to say that the Arabs have known the theatre since the middle ages no longer needs to seem strange or provocative”.² Friederike Pannewick is University Professor at the Philips University of Marburg, specialized in Arabic Studies. In a close look at the roots of Arabic theatricality and a deeply comprehensive examination of its present, Pannewick recognizes elements of the avantgarde in some of the most traditional Arab theatrical forms:

“Research was undertaken into a variety of sources, extending from the Middle Ages to European travel journals, and located a whole series of instances of Arabian techniques for acting and portrayal, ones however that had very little to do with classical European drama. In fact they contained elements which, since the sixties, many of Europe’s avant-garde performance artists have gone back to so as to dissociate themselves from traditional bourgeois drama”.³

Pannewick also points out that despite its unique character, Arabic theatricality must be seen and understood in connection with international debates on theater and the intercultural exchange, which is a basic condition to keep theater alive.⁴ At this point, one must consider the long and complex relations between the Arab world and Europe.

From resisting colonial powers to fascination with European culture, through attempts to break away from that fascination by seeking Arabic theatricality within own history and culture, and finally migration, Arabs’ cultural relationship with the west have seen ebb and flow every so often. This research does not aim to explore Arabic theatricality in general, which means it is not intended as an encyclopedic work, although it benefits greatly from

-
- 1 Ghassan Al-Maleh, “Syria” in: Don Rubin et al. (Ed.), *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre. (Arab world) Vol. 4*, New York 2003, 234–249, 234.
 - 2 Ali Al-Rai, “Some Aspects of Modern Arabic Drama”, in: R. C. Ostle (Ed.): *Studies in Modern Arabic Literature*, Warminster 1975, 174.
 - 3 Friederike Pannewick, *Das Wagnis Tradition: Arabische Wege Der Theatralität, Literaturen Im Kontext 2*, Wiesbaden: Reichert 2000, 1. This study was submitted in 1999 as a dissertation in Arabic Studies at the Free University of Berlin and supervised by Angelika Neuwirth and Erika Fischer-Lichte.
 - 4 Cf. Pannewick, 2000, 6.

such efforts to trace and find the political examples it seeks to examine, as the following pages will demonstrate.

1.1 Research question and objectives

As Roger Allen seeks the “dramatic” in Arabic theater,⁵ this research will be tracing the *political*. This includes political satire, portrayal of political figures, anti-colonialism, anti-authoritarian content and Marxist threads in Arabic theater of the 1960s and 1970s, all of which constitute the origin of Arabic theater in European exile since 2015. This link between the past and the present is almost completely missing today, where, regardless of their education and experience, Arabic theater artists in Europe are mainly seen as refugees, and are often bound to play that role constantly on stage.⁶

With such a long history, it is very difficult to trace Arabic political theater to its very beginnings.⁷ However, we do have recorded instances starting in the Medieval times. One of the earliest examples of political satire in Arabic theater can indeed be found in Medieval Arabic literature,⁸ where, under the rule of caliph Uthman (644–656), a jester by the name of Ash’ab of the Medina (*631) staged a story satirizing a judge in Baghdad, who, due to the great success and popularity of that staging, became so infamous and had to give up his post and flee to Syria.⁹ Aside from jesters and mime artists, another popular theatrical form which flourished in the medieval Arab world brings us striking instances of political satire: The shadow play, in particular the work of poet and shadow theater artist Ibn Daniyal (1248–1311),¹⁰ who satirized censorship and strict Islamic moral code that was intermittently imposed by the politicians of his time.

This very early example of political engagement in Arabic theater was followed by many courageous attempts to challenge authoritarian rule, both local and foreign (during Ottoman and then European occupation of the Middle East). For an in-depth examination of some of the most influential of these instances, I will be relying on a number of studies dealing with

5 Roger M. A. Allen, “Drama” in: *Introduction to Arabic Literature*. New York: 2000, 193–215; “Arabic Drama”, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Arabic-literature/Drama>, 28.11.2022.

6 Cf. Christopher Balme, “Dichte Aufführungen. Zur Ethnologie des postdramatischen Theaters” in: Bloch; Heimböckel; Tropper et al. (Hg.), *Theater und Ethnologie: Beiträge zu einer produktiven Beziehung*, Tübingen 2016, 21–32, 31f.

7 Considering that much of this cultural heritage has been lost or destroyed completely over time.

8 Al-Isfahani, *Kitab al-Agani*, Bd. XI, 338f, Cf. Pannewick, 2000, 154–155.

9 Ali Uqla Ursan, *al-mazahir al-masrahiya inda l- arab* (Theatrical Phenomena of the Arabs), Damascus 1985, 41–43; Pannewick 154–155.

10 Badawi, 1982, 83–107, 84.

Arabic theatricality to trace Arabic political theater in history, from medieval shadow theater through first testimonials under the Ottomans, to the 1960s and 1970s, a period that witnessed a “new wave of Arab theatrical realization”,¹¹ particularly in Syria and Lebanon. The research will work to test the thesis of continuity in Arabic political theater, through observing its most important aspects and examining the patterns that distinguish it and grant it its own, unique character, its social and political value, and its relevance and connection to contemporary theatrical endeavors in German exile. The aim is to create a differentiated perception of Arab stage artists in the German speaking area, by illuminating the extremely rich and very old, indeed ancient tradition they belong to, as well as the artistic and cultural context their work has been stripped of.

1.2 Theoretical landscape and state of research

Sources on Arabic theatricality and the history of Arabic theater include academic research and documentation in Arabic, German, English and French. Among her many contributions to the theme of Arabic culture, Friederike Pannewick produced one of the first academic studies of Arabic theatricality and theater theory in German (2000). In *Das Wagnis Tradition: Arabische Wege Der Theatralität*,¹² Pannewick relies on the criteria of theatricality or “communication between actors and audience”¹³ as well as the writings of Arab intellectuals and theater experts to approach Arabic drama and examine elements of the avantgarde long present there.¹⁴ In her analysis, Pannewick adopts an expanded definition of theater, where the stage is not exclusively institutional, observing that: “[...] in der Diskussion darüber, ob Formen wie rituelle Rollenspiele, Stegreifszenen oder Maskenspiele überhaupt dem Bereich des Theaters zuzuordnen seien, wurden von der Mehrheit der europäischen ebenso wie von einigen arabischen Wissenschaftlern weder überzeugende noch dem Gegenstand angemessene Definitionen von Theater bzw. Drama vorgebracht”.¹⁵ Pannewick’s expanded approach is based on Erika Fischer-Lichte’s definition of the minimal theatrical situation:

“Denn da Theater sich immer dort ereignet, wo der Schauspieler A eine Rollenfigur X verkörpert, während der Zuschauer S zuschaut, ist die Möglichkeit für diese Wahl bereits mit der

11 Mas’ud Hamdan, *Poetics, Politics and Protest in Arab Theatre: The Bitter Cup and the Holy Rain*, East Sussex 2008.

12 Pannewick, 2000.

13 Pannewick, 2000, 1–10, 1.

14 Regarding elements of the avantgarde in Arabic theater see also: Marvin Carlson, “Avant-Garde Drama in the Middle East” in: Harding; Rouse (Ed.), *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance*, Michigan 2010, 125–144.

15 Pannewick 2000, 5. For an elaborate examination of this point and Pannewick’s stance on the subject see: “Ebene des Systems – Das Ereignis Theater” in: Pannewick, 2000, 11–50.

Minimaldefinition theatralischer Prozesse gegeben. Ohne daß also aufgrund einer vorab erfolgten, ersten ‘unwissenschaftlichen’ Rezeption bereits Vorannahmen über die Struktur der Aufführung und ihre daraus resultierende Eignung für ein bestimmtes Verfahren der Isotopienherstellung gegeben wären, läßt sich jede Analyse vom Segment der Rollenfigur her beginnen. Sie stellt daher in gewisser Weise die fundamentale Isotopieebene einer Aufführung dar”.¹⁶

Based on Eric Bentley’s views,¹⁷ Fischer-Lichte’s minimal definition of theater enables an expanded concept of it, including elements such as rituals and traditional folk practices:

“Von Theater sprechen wir immer dann, wenn folgende Bedingung gegeben ist: A verkörpert X, während S zuschaut. Diese Bedingung wird jedoch nicht nur von Autonomen Theater erfüllt, sondern ebenso von den theatralischen Aktivitäten der Naturvölker, in denen sie zum Teil als magische Praktiken in Zusammenhang mit Ritualen durchgeführt werden”.¹⁸

Regarding Arabic theatricality, Pannewick refers to the criteria defined by Syrian literary scholar and playwright Ali Uqla Ursan, who sets the following elements to outline a typical Arabic theatrical situation: A specific, reproducible action, a certain location and allocated time agreed on by the audience.¹⁹ From this starting point, Pannewick moves to examine most diverse theater forms in the Arabic world from premodernity to the late 20th century in the Levant.

The first academic works on medieval Arabic shadow theater, where my research starts, were brought to life by German Orientalists,²⁰ most prominently Georg Jacob, Paul Kahle and Enno Littmann. Jacob laid the foundation for research on Egypt and the Levant and was the first to discover and publish parts of Ibn Daniyal’s medieval shadow theater scripts,²¹ in which he

16 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Semiotik des Theaters*, Tübingen 1983, Bd. 3, 83.

17 See: Eric Bentley, “A Plot Is Not a Play” in *The Life of The Drama*, New York 1964, 31–34.

18 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Semiotik des Theaters*, Tübingen 1983, Bd. 1, p. 7, Anm. 1. (quoted after Pannewick, 2000, 143). Fischer-Lichte’s view of the theaterical situation is reminiscent of Gramsci’s pluralistic understanding of philosophy: “The common misconception that philosophy is a strange and arduous task, simply because it is a distinct mental activity that a group of specialists or professional systematic philosophers engage in, should be dispelled. What must be clarified – first of all – is that all human beings are ‘philosophers’, by defining the limits and features of ‘spontaneous philosophy’ practiced by everyone. This philosophy is to be found in: 1) Language – as language is a set of specific data and concepts, not just words without grammatical content. 2) In ‘popular wisdom’ and in ‘common sense’. 3) In folk-religion, and thus in the whole system of beliefs, superstitions, views and modes of behavior that are all encompassed by the name ‘folklore’ [Trans. Y. A.]”. Antonio Gramsci, *On Historical Materialism* with introduction by Régis Debray. Trans. Fawwaz Traboulsi, Milan 2018.

19 Ursan, Ali Uqla, p. 15–29, quoted after Pannewick, 2000, 141.

20 More accurately “German Semitists-Arabists”, as playwright and scholar Li Guo puts it. Li Guo, *Arabic Shadow Theatre, 1300-1900, Handbook of Oriental Studies*, volume 143, Section 1, the Near and Middle East, Leiden; Boston 2020, 18. See also: Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab People*, New York 1992, 198.

21 See: Georg Jacob, *al-Mutaijam, Ein altarabisches Schauspiel für die Schattenbühne bestimmt von Muhammad ibn Dâniyâl*, Erlangen 1901; *Bibliographie über das Schattentheater*, Erlangen 1902; *Textproben aus dem Escorial-Codex des Muḥammed ibn Dâniyâl*, Erlangen 1902; *Markttypen aus ‘Agîb wa-Ġarîb*, Erlangen 1907; Stücke aus Ibn Dâniyâl’s Taif al-ḥajâl / für Vorlesungszwecke abgedruckt von George Jacob, 3 vols., Erlangen 1910–2; “Der Nâtû und sein Lied bei Ibn Dâniyâl”, in: *Der Islam* 1.2 (1910), 178–82; “Ajîb ed-dîn al-wâiz bei Ibn Dâniyâl”, in: *Der Islam* 4 (1913), 67–71; *Geschichte des Schattentheaters im Morgen-*

managed to “identify and tackle the thorny challenges Ibn Dāniyāl’s corpus posed – tracking down manuscripts, cracking the oftentimes code-like technical terms, and deciphering the mysterious and puzzle-ridden texts”.²² A colleague of Jacob’s at Erlangen, Paul Kahle, carried the torch of research on Arabic shadow theater, promoted it in the west and collected figures and puppets from different Arabic regions.²³ His series of publications were of great importance to next generations of research and are more widely accessible as he published in both German and English.²⁴ A third milestone in the Orientalists’ grand contribution to the documentation of Arabic shadow theater is the work of Enno Littmann, who wandered in the Levant of the 19th century, studied and deciphered Levantine dialects and published shadow theater scripts from Damascus and Aleppo.²⁵

The work of German Orientalists was highly influential in the Arabic world. It is thought that “Arab intelligentsia rediscovered their cultural heritage of shadow play through German Orientalism around the turn-of-the-century”,²⁶ as Li Guo writes in his recent, most comprehensive publication on Arabic shadow theater. Other important studies on the subject include the work of M. M. Badawi, who helped publish Kahle’s translation of Ibn Daniyal’s medieval scripts,²⁷ the work of Badawi’s student Roger Allen (2000),²⁸ as well as very insightful essays by Cyrus Ali Zargar (2006)²⁹ and Marvin Carlson (2013).³⁰ This relatively

und Abenland, Hannover 1925; *Neue Mitteilungen aus Ibn Dāniyāl*, Kiel 1934.

22 Guo, 2020, 19.

23 Cf. Guo, 2020, 21.

24 Paul Kahle, *Zur Geschichte des arabischen Schattentheaters in Egypten*, Leipzig 1909; “Islamische Schattenspielfiguren aus Egypten”, in: *Der Islam* 1 (1910), 264–99; 2 (1911), 143–95; “Marketszene aus einem ägyptischen Schattenspiel”, in: *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 27 (1912), 92–102; “Das Krokodilspiel (Li’b et-Timsāh), ein ägyptisches Schattenspiel”, in: *Nachrichten von der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen: Philologisch-Historische Klasse* (Göttingen 1915), 288–359; “Eine Zunftsprache der ägyptischen Schattenspieler”, in: *Islamica* 2 (1926–7), 313–22; *Der Leuchtturm von Alexandria: Ein arabisches Schattenspiel aus den Mittelalterlichen ägyptes*, Stuttgart 1930; “The Arabic shadow play in Egypt”, in: *JRAS* (1940), 21–34; Muḥammad Ibn Dāniyāl (gest. 1311) und seine arabischen Schattenspiele aus Ägypten, *Actes du XX. congrès international des orientalistes* (Bruxelles, 1938), 324–5; Louvian 1940; Muḥammad Ibn Dāniyāl und seine zweites arabisches schattenspiel, *Miscellanea Academica Berolinensia*, Erlangen 1950.

25 See: Enno Littmann, E., “Ein arabisches Karagöz-spiel”, in: *ZDMG*, 54 (1900), 661–80; *Arabische Schattenspiele mit Anhängen von G. Jacob*, Berlin 1901; *Das Malerspiel: ein Schattenspiel aus Aleppo nach einer armenisch-türkischen Handschrift*, University Library Heidelberg 1918.

26 Guo, 2020, 18.

27 Kahle, P. (Ed.), *Three shadow plays by Muḥammad Ibn Dāniyāl*, with a critical apparatus by D. Hopwood; prepared for publication by D. Hopwood and M. M. Badawi, Cambridge 1992 (repr. 2015). See also: Badawi, “Medieval Arabic Drama: Ibn Dāniyāl”, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 13, 1982, 83–107.

28 Roger M. A. Allen, “Drama” in: *Introduction to Arabic Literature*. New York: 2000, 193–215.

29 Cyrus Ali Zargar, “The Satiric Method of Ibn Dāniyāl: Morality and Anti-Morality in ‘Ṭayf Al-Khayāl’”, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37/1, 2006, 68–108.

30 Marvin Carlson, “The Arab Aristophanes”, *Comparative Drama*: Vol. 47: Iss. 2, 2013, 151–282.

rich output should enable me to have a thorough look at this very early form of Arab theater, and perhaps to start drawing the line to the next instance that I will be analyzing.

Sources on Syrian theater pioneer Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani, the second mile stone in this study, are mostly in Arabic, including research by Syrian and Egyptian scholars Muhammad Yusuf Nagm,³¹ Adil Abu Shanab,³² and Saadallah Wannous,³³ who took special interest in Al-Qabbani's endeavor to stage in Arabic, as well as his struggle with Damascene fundamentalists and conservative elites in the 19th century. Arabist and cultural studies scholar Regina Karachouli's 1992 article³⁴ on the life, work and influence of Al-Qabbani is a very good source on the subject in German. The text includes detailed biographical information and an attempt at objective analysis. This is not easy to come by in the available, post-orientalist scholar work on Al-Qabbani, which often contains inaccurate views³⁵ and archaic language.³⁶ Later research on Al-Qabbani (1980–2010) includes re-documentation and analysis by M. M. Badawi,³⁷ Roger Allen and Philip Sadgrove.³⁸

The years 2017, 2018 and 2022 saw new, important publications in Arabic about Al-Qabbani's life and ambitious projects. Arabist and theater scholar Sayed Ali Ismail studies and analyzes Al-Qabbani's theatrical endeavors in Egypt and his impact on Egyptian theater, shedding light on the reception of his plays in major newspapers of the time.³⁹ Ismail also includes several of Al-Qabbani's original play scripts, which have been printed in Egypt since 1900.⁴⁰ This rare collection of press articles and scripts enables the tracing of an important chapter of Al-Qabbani's story, since his arrival in Alexandria on 23. 06. 1884 until his theater burned down on 18. 05. 1900. The articles have not been studied or re-published anywhere else, they speak of the great success of Al-Qabbani's plays as well as the fierce competition he was faced with

31 Muhammad Yusuf Nagm, *al-Masrahiya fi al-adab al-arabi al-hadith* (Theater Play in Modern Arabic Literature), Beirut 1956.

32 Adil Abu Shanab, *Hayat Abi Halil al-Qabbani* (The life of Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani), in: *al-Mauqif al-adabi*, Damascus, 89, 1978.

33 Saadallah Wannous, "Limada waqafat ar-ragiya didd Abi Halil al-Qabbani?" (Why Did Reactionary Conservatism Oppose Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani) in: *Bayanat li masrah arabi gadid* (Manifests for a new Arabic Theater), Beirut 1988 (1970¹ in: *Al-Ma'rifa* Nr. 104), 59–77.

34 Regina Karachouli, "Abu Halil Al-Qabbānī (1833–1902)- Damaszener Theatergründer und Prinzipal", *Die Welt des Islams* 32/1, 1992, 83–98.

35 Such as those of Ali Al-Rai, who doesn't seem to recognize the social-political context in which Al-Qabbani operated and the implications of the strongly hostile reaction, with which his work was faced. See: Al-Rai, 1999, 67, 68.

36 See for instance: M. Y. Nagm, 1956.

37 M. M. Badawi, *Early Arabic Drama*, Cambridge 1988.

38 Philip Sadgrove, "Ahmad Abū Khalīl al-Qabbānī" in: Roger Allen (Ed.), *Essays in Arabic literary biography* 3, 1850–1950, Wiesbaden 2010.

39 Among others *Al-Ahram* and *Al Muqattam* newspapers.

40 Sayed Ali Ismail, *juhoud al qabbani al masrahiya fi misr* (Al-Qabbani's Theatrical Endeavors in Egypt), Windsor 2017.

while trying to establish his Arabic operetta in Egypt. Finally, Ismail laments the lack of similar research covering a previous period of Al-Qabbani's life and work in Damascus, and calls upon Syrian theater scholars to produce the missing link.

In response to Ismail's calling, Syrian historian and author Taissier Khalaf started a series of publications on the subject in 2018.⁴¹ Khalaf cites historical documents, newspaper articles as well as memoirs and biographies of actors, travellers and orientalists to document Al-Qabbani's life and work in Syria (1873–1883),⁴² thereby providing the first detailed account to that chapter. Khalaf also covers in detail Al-Qabbani's trip to the United States to stage in the Chicago World's Fair (World's Columbian Exposition, May 1, 1893–October 30, 1893). Moreover, Khalaf studies the memoirs of actor Omar Wasfi and actress Miriam Sammat, who were active in Al-Qabbani's troupe between 1894 and 1901, thereby illuminating the extremely difficult work conditions of Arabic theater actors⁴³ and troupes of the 19th century under Ottoman rule.⁴⁴ Khalaf's documentation brings about many previously unknown details and new ways of looking at theater history in the region, which makes it a significant contribution within the context of social and cultural history of the Levant and Egypt, particularly during the last quarter of the 19th century.

My examination of Al-Qabbani's theater and social-political struggle is largely (albeit not exclusively) based on Ismail and Khalaf's work, thus making parts of it available in English for the first time.

In the footsteps of German Orientalists, whose in-depth analysis of Arabic culture and refined comprehension of the Arabic language was unprecedented, Pannewick delves into the work of a wide array of Arabic historians and philosophers,⁴⁵ from medieval scholars to Sadiq Jalal al-Azm and Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, using gained insight to examine post World War II Egyptian and Levantine theater. Pannewick's research covers only a part of political Levantine theater of the 1960's–1970's. This period witnessed significant theatrical endeavors and projects in the region, such as Saadallah Wannous's theater of politicization, the plays of

41 Taissier Khalaf, *min dimashq ila chicago, rihlat abi khalil al qabbani ila america 1893* (From Damascus to Chicago, Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani's Journey to America 1893), Beirut 2018; *nash'at al masrah fi biladisham 1847-1917* (The Birth of Theater in the Levant 1847–1917), Sharjah 2018; *waqae' masrah Abi Khalil Alqabbani fi Dimashq 1873–1883* (The Chronicles of Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani's Theater in Damascus 1873–1883), Milan 2019; *seirat al ajwak al arabiya fi al qarn al tase'ashar* (Biography of Arabic Theater Troupes in the 19th Century), Milan 2022.

42 See Ismail's preface in: T. Khalaf, 2019, 5–8.

43 Some of which are descendants of very religious families, as is the case with Omar Wasfi and Al-Qabbani himself, who had to challenge their social settings by leaving the mosque to the theater.

44 Khalaf, Milan 2022.

45 Beside several Arabic theater scholars and critics, see p. 4, 24.

Usrat Tishreen (October Troupe) and Al-Rahbani Family, with the last two completely missing in Pannewick's work.

In 2007 Christopher Stone's *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon*⁴⁶ came out. Stone studies the work of the prominent Al-Rahbani brothers in Lebanon as popular culture representatives and a symbol for the nation. Missing in Stone's work is a comprehensive look at the highly popular work of theater director, composer and political commentator Ziad Al-Rahbani (second generation), with its Marxist content and huge influence on the Lebanese and Arabic youth. A year later, the first and only academic book dealing with Usrat Tishreen saw the light.⁴⁷ The research is conducted by Mas'ud Hamdan, professor of Arabic literature and theater at the University of Haifa. Hamdan sheds light on the Tishreen political plays, whose pungent content and poetic dialogues / mocking word allusions helped creating an unprecedented cultural phenomenon in the Arabic world during the 1970s.

In the last chapter of this study I will be focusing on the above mentioned, understudied projects, thereby connecting them to earlier forms and instances of Arabic political theater, which were examined in the previous chapters. My contribution to research on Levantine political theater of this period is an attempt to add to an extremely modest literature volume and will hopefully usher similar efforts in the years to come.

1.2.1 The geographical scope of the term "Arabic" as used in this study

The term "Arabic" refers to a large geographical area, several countries and one language: The Semitic language of the Arabs, spoken by over 300 million people throughout the Middle East, North Africa and the rest of the globe. The problem with the term is that it refers to something that is simply too large. In this research I am going to deal with this problem by focusing on the Levant, with its Syrian/Lebanese center, as the area which produced some of the most prominent political theater creators in the Arab world. That said, in the context of art and culture in the Middle East, one must always recognize the Egyptian element both as a source and foster environment for Arab artists,⁴⁸ as well as Turks and south-Europeans.⁴⁹

46 Christopher Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon: The Fairouz and Rahbani Nation*, New York 2007.

47 Mas'ud Hamdan, *Poetics, Politics and Protest in Arab Theatre: The Bitter Cup and the Holy Rain*, East Sussex 2008.

48 "Bis zu den sechziger Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts war Ägypten das Zentrum der arabischen Dramatik und die wesentlichen Theatertheorien wurden zunächst von Ägyptern entworfen. Denn seitdem die Pioniere des arabischen Adaptionstheaters seit Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts aus Beirut und Damaskus nach Ägypten emigriert waren, wurde arabisches Theater gleichbedeutend mit ägyptischem Theater. Erst in den sechziger Jahren entwickelte sich auch in anderen arabischen Ländern ein selbständiges und formenreiches Theater, welches die Monopolstellung Ägyptens relativierte und allmählich aufhob". Pannewick, 2000, 84.

49 Among others actor and film director Stéphane Rosti (1891–1964) of Italian-Austrian origin; Greek film

Historically, and in an almost uninterrupted manner, Egypt has been the most significant Arabic cultural hub. As far as Arabic drama, film and performing arts are concerned, working in Egypt was (and still is) the definition of professional success and the way to prominence.⁵⁰ As a source of human talent and gateway to Egypt, the Levant, in turn, has historically embraced Iraqi theater, which by dint of its roots in religious ceremony, produced some of the earliest forms of Arabic theatricality.⁵¹

Over decades and centuries, Iraqi directors and playwrights moved, settled in and worked in Damascus.⁵² Consequently it is possible to assume that the area extending from Iraq (east) to Egypt (south west) is the beating heart of Arabic theater. The problematic at hand is then the large scope of the topic which is not easy to define, but which may be tackled through comprehensive approach and careful selection of relevant examples, following in the footsteps of American teatrologist Marvin Carlson, who addresses this particular point in his essay “Avant-Garde Drama in the Middle East”:

“The geographical scope of this essay requires some explanation. The theatrical tradition I am exploring is primarily that of the modern Arab world, which in terms of theater has been historically dominated by Egypt and Syria. These are the two Arab states with the most fully developed modern theater tradition, and not coincidentally, are the two states in which, despite a dominant colonial and postcolonial influence from the European theater, a modern avant-garde tradition not drawn from European sources has developed, both in theory and practice. Although obviously it is a significant element of the Middle Eastern scene, and in modern times one of its most important producers of theater, I do not discuss the Israeli theater, since its development (aside of course from the heavy indebtedness to the European stage) has very little in common with the theater of its Arab neighbors, especially in respect to the avant-garde experimentation that concerns me here. On the other hand, I will devote some attention in the opening of this essay to the Ta’ziyeh theater of Iran, which is neither Arabic nor, some would argue, strictly Middle Eastern, because it does provide some important background for the discussion of a modern avant-garde in the Arab Middle Eastern theater”.⁵³

With this in mind, I am especially focusing on the work of Arabic political theater artists who were able to reach society as a whole without having to resort to commercial means, thereby

composer Andre Ryder (1908–1971) and Italian-French singer/actress Iolanda Cristina Gigliotti known as Dalida (1933–1987). Many Egyptian artists with European background who were introduced to Arab audiences through Egyptian cinema descended from European parents who worked in the music and performance field under Khedival dynasty (1805–1952) as is the case with Rosti’s mother (a theater actress) or Dalida’s father Pietro Gigliotti (1904–1945), who was primo violino at Cairo’s Khedivial Opera House. See: Stéphane Rosti’s biography, available at: https://www.bibalex.org/alexcinema/actors/stephane_rosti.html, 13. 11. 2022; Dalida, biographie, <https://dalida.com/biographie/son-histoire.html>, 13. 11. 2022. For more on the subject see Philip Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century: 1799-1882*, Reading 1996; Paolo Petrocelli, *The Evolution of Opera Theatre in the Middle East and North Africa*, Cambridge 2019.

50 From the Medieval shadow theater of Ibn Daniyal to the Levantine Abu Khalil Al Qabbani and Marun Al Naqqash, through the 19th and 20th century and all the way to the present (today in particular film and television writers, actors and directors).

51 Cf. Ali Uqla Urgan, 1985, 15–29; Pannewick, 2000, 141.

52 Among others Awni Karoumi and Jawad al-Assadi.

53 Carlson, 2010, 142.

creating new genres dealing with difficult, thorny themes, in an attempt to build and develop an Arabic theater which has the capacity to amuse and educate.

2. The Seeds of Political Arabic Satire

As shown in the previous pages, the origins of Arabic theater are far too old and complex to be merely traced to western influence. On the other hand, a number of prominent traditional dramatic forms ranging from mime and religious ceremony to story-telling and shadow play, have been considered a possible birthplace of Arabic political theater by both, western and Arab scholars. Roger M. A. Allen writes that Arabic cafés and public places have historically “provided venues for shadow plays, which regularly poked fun at the foibles of politicians and bureaucrats”.⁵⁴ As a highly popular dramatic form, shadow play offered a kind of entertainment that deeply reflects on, and sharply criticizes the prevailing social and political reality of pre-modern Arab societies. This gave it an incredible longevity as an art form, despite being an object of censorship and prosecution every so often: In many instances, shadow theater directly addressed and exposed the exploitation of lower classes by the regime and related powerful entities, which caused it to be banned over and over throughout its very long history, as Iraqi theater scholar and director Fadel Soudani notes.⁵⁵

The oldest reference to Arabic shadow theater goes back to the Abbasid dynasty (750–1258),⁵⁶ when shadow play was associated with the most refined Arabic prosimetric known as the *maqama*.⁵⁷ Just like paper and many essential goods, this art form could have traveled to the Arab world through trade from China via Indonesia.⁵⁸ It is possible to assume that shadow theater was known in Iraq and Syria before Egypt, as the oldest reference to it in Egypt dates to the 11th century, in the writing the optician Ibn al-Haytham, who describes a puppet performance consisting of “figures [...] which [the presenter] moves so that their shadows appear upon the wall which is behind the curtain and on the curtain itself”.⁵⁹ This record was

54 Roger Allen, “Drama”, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Arabic-literature/Drama>, 28. 11. 2022.

55 Cf. Fadel Soudani, “Arabic and Islamic Shadow Theater”, Modern Discussion, 2. 6. 2007, <https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=100858>, 27.11.2022.

56 Cf. Li Guo, Arabic Shadow Theatre, 1300-1900, *Handbook of Oriental Studies*, volume 143, Section 1, the Near and Middle East, Leiden; Boston 2020, 3; Alra'i, Ali, *Das Theater in der arabischen Welt*. 2. Aufl. Kuwait 1999, 29, 39.

57 Cf. Al-Rai, 1999, 29, 39.

58 Cf. William O. Beeman, “Theater in the Middle East” in: Martin Banham, (Ed.), *Cambridge Guide to World Theatre*, Cambridge 1988, 664–676, 665. See also: Ayad Abed Lateef, “Entstehung des arabischen Theaters und Rezeption des deutschen Theaters im arabischen Raum (Ägypten, Syrien, Libanon und Irak)”, Dissertation, Europa-Universität Flensburg, Institut für Sprache, Literatur und Medien 2017, 22 and Lothar Müller, “Das arabische Zwischenreich” in: *Weiß Magie: Die Epoche des Papiers*, München 2012, 19–27.

59 Marvin Carlson, “The Arab Aristophanes”, *Comparative Drama*: Vol. 47: Iss. 2, 2013, 151–282, 153.

followed by reports from a century later, speaking of Saladin, the first sultan of Egypt and Syria, who would invite shadow play performers to his court in Cairo.⁶⁰ Oxford scholar M. M. Badawi traces shadow theater in Egypt even further back, namely to the 10th century, also quoting Ibn al-Haytham:

“We know, of course, from other sources that the Arabic shadow theatre had been flourishing in Fatimid Egypt. There are references to it in the tenth century, the most explicit and perhaps earliest of which is to be found in the works of the great scientist Ibn al-Haytham (born in 965 A.D.), who discusses the mechanics of it in his magnum opus on optics”.⁶¹

Several centuries later, shadow theater came to Istanbul from Egypt, as many historians and theater scholars suggest.⁶² The oldest source where this view is recorded is in the writings of Mamluk historian Ibn Iyas, “who reported that Sultan Selim, the Ottoman conqueror of Egypt in 1517, saw his first shadow play in Cairo. [...] He brought the puppets and performer back to Istanbul with him, from which the Turkish form developed”,⁶³ with the most prominent Arabic texts from the Middle Ages: The plays of the “Mosul-born, Cairo-based”⁶⁴ ophthalmologist and dramatist Ibn Daniyal (1248 in Iraq; 1310 in Egypt).⁶⁵

2.1 Ibn Daniyal and the medieval shadow play

Written in very sophisticated language and quite popular at courts, yet strongly connected to lower social strata and the everyday life, medieval Arabic shadow play brings highly contrasted elements together. In his 1912 foreword to one of the three medieval scripts of Ibn Daniyal, Georg Jacob writes:

“In wenigen arabischen Texten dürfte die Ausbeute für das Wörterbuch eine so reiche wie bei Ibn Dānījāl sein. Bei seiner grossen Lebendigkeit und Frische verwendet er oft nichtzünftiges Sprachgut und prägt neue Formen. Für die Volkskunde des Islam besitzen wir, wenigstens in der arabischen Literatur, schwerlich eine wichtigere Quelle als ihn”.⁶⁶

The highly complex language used in these scripts indicates that they are “far from being a

60 Cf. Shmuel Moreh, “The Shadow Play in the Light of Arabic Literature,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 18, 1987, 46–61.

61 Al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham, *Kitab al-Manazir*, Ed. Abd al-Hamid Sabra, III.6. [23–25] quoted after M. M. Badawi, “Medieval Arabic Drama: Ibn Dānījāl”, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 13, 1982, 83–107, 83.

62 See: Nikolai N. Martinovich, *The Turkish Theatre*, New York 1933, 31–32.; Alra’i, 1999, 44; Carlson, 2013, 154; Marie Elias; Hanan Kassab Hassan, *Das Lexikon des Theaters*, Beirut 2006, 191; Dror Ze’evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500–1900*, Berkeley 2006, 128; Guo, Li, 2020, 17.

63 Carlson, 2013, 154.

64 Guo, 2020, 7, 8.

65 Badawi, 1982, 84.

66 Georg Jacob (Ed.), *Stücke aus Ibn Dānījāls Taif al-ḥajāl, Die Eröffnungsszene aus 'Agīb wa-Ġarīb* - [Brock S II, 2] Ibn-Dānījāl, Muḥammad, Berlin 1912, 4.

solitary or even unusual phenomenon, as is sometimes assumed”,⁶⁷ but rather represent an advanced point in medieval Arabic shadow theater craft.⁶⁸ Marvin Carlson goes as far as saying that as a “most exceptional author”, Ibn Daniyal “raised the form to indisputable literary heights”.⁶⁹ Moreover, Ibn Daniyal’s complex dramatic structure⁷⁰ and “high poetic style” that is coupled with “extreme obscenity”⁷¹ are an unmistakable indication of an aristophanic influence:

“Given the fact that these are also the years when Aristophanes was enjoying an enormous vogue in Byzantine literary circles, far greater than that of any other classical dramatist, it is surely reasonable to conjecture that Ibn Dāniyāl might well have received during his court years information about this dramatist, either through his literary or court contacts. Thus, the striking structural resemblance of his final play to an Aristophanic comedy may not at all be simply a bizarre coincidence, but seems quite possibly to have been the result of a direct, if serendipitous, connection. If that is the case, and the circumstantial evidence is considerable, there is more reason than ever to characterize this thirteenth-century dramatist as, in fact, the Arab Aristophanes”.⁷²

Being so well refined and largely entertaining, it is no coincidence that such works of art were welcome to take place at courts, as Arabist and playwright Li Guo finds while studying the accounts of Ibn Iyas (d. c. 1524). The historian is regarded as “one of the most significant witnesses to the twilight years of the Mamluks and the beginning of the Ottoman ruling”,⁷³ who documented the popularity of shadow play at the Fatimid courts, as we also read in Paul Kahle.⁷⁴ With this in mind, the scripts we have, as well as accounts from historians and poets, indicate that the Arabic medieval shadow play was especially concerned with ordinary life

67 Cf. Badawi, 1982, 83.

68 Roger Allen notes: “It is clear from the introduction to his plays that the genre was not a new one in his day; one of the purposes that Ibn Dāniyāl has in recording these examples is to provide fresh materials for a medium where much of the material has become hackneyed”. Allen, Roger, “Drama” in: *Introduction to Arabic Literature*, New York 2000, 195.

69 Carlson, 2013, 154.

70 “Aristophanic” pattern of play construction according to Carlson: The opening of the play is a monologue or dialogue that introduces the subject matter. The next element is the entrance song of the chorus. The parodos is followed by a set in which the chorus supports or opposes the concerns or project of the hero. Next comes a set of balanced or symmetrical scenes, often in the form of an agon or parabasis, or both. The contest, or agon, pits two characters against each other in a conflict that anticipates the conclusion of the action. In the parabasis, normally at the middle of the play, the main actors leave the stage, and the chorus steps out of the play to address the audience directly. A series of episodes follows, short scenes involving only one or two minor characters each, usually showing the effects of the outcome of the agon. Finally comes the departure song of the chorus, the exodus, with a mood of celebration often involving revelry and a joyous marriage, or both. These elements could be varied somewhat (there is no formal agon, for example, in *The Acharnians*, while there are two in *The Clouds*), but on the whole this complex pattern is quite consistent. [...] It is therefore quite surprising to find that in his third play, *The Love-Stricken One and the Lost One Who Inspires Passion*, Ibn Dāniyāl follows this pattern in remarkable detail. Carlson, 2013, 156–157.

71 Carlson, 2013, 156.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’ al-zuhūr fī waqā’i’ al-duhūr*, Ed. M. Mostafa, 5 vols. in 6, Wiesbaden 1975, quoted after Li Guo, 2000, 18.

74 Cf. Paul Kahle, “The Arabic Shadow Play in Egypt”, in: the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (JRAS), 1940, 20; Badawi, 1982, 84.

outside of courts and places of high culture, as their topics were often “deeply rooted in social reality”.⁷⁵ Beside other, popular pre-modern Arabic forms such as musical slapstick and maqama poetry, and regardless of its degree of sophistication, Arabic shadow play is known for its strong attachment to the daily life of societal microcosmos,⁷⁶ as the following pages will show.

2.1.1 Scenes of Cairene underground

An important indicator to the great influence of medieval Arabic shadow play is “The Poem of the Way”⁷⁷ by Egyptian mystic Umar ibn al-Farid (1182–1235).⁷⁸ The poet describes various scenes from the shadow play of his time, thereby providing the oldest detailed account of Arabic shadow theater available.⁷⁹ M. M. Badawi studies this poem pointing out a large array of topics, equaling contrasted genres of action and drama as well as comedy and simple daily life situations: Here are examples of various scenes ranging “from heroic to the common and homely everyday life scene: armies fighting, land and sea battles, knights and infantry, heavily armed with swords, spears and arrows, seamen on the decks of ships, soldiers routed and castles destroyed”.⁸⁰ Beside battles and war affairs the scenes also feature mythical creatures and “fishermen catching fish with nets, fowlers spreading their gins for unsuspecting birds, benighted camels racing through the desert, ships tossed by the waves or wrecked by sea monsters, lions of the jungle, beasts of the wilderness and birds preying upon one another”.⁸¹

In Ibn Daniyal’s second play, *ajib wa gharib* (Strange and Curious),⁸² where the main character is a Trickster, the following characters appear in order:

“a snake-charmer, a quack-doctor, a hawker of medicinal herbs, an opthalmic surgeon, an acrobat, an astrologer, a trader in amulets, a lion tamer, an elephant juggler, a phlebotomist/prostitute, a trainer of cats (and mice), a dog trainer, a tamer of bears, a Sudanese clown, a sword swallower, a monkey trainer, a rope dancer, a conjurer with self-inflicted wounds, a torch-bearer, and finally a camel driver”.⁸³

75 Badawi, 1982, 93.

76 Cf. Pannewick, 2000, 139.

77 Ibn al-Farid, *The Poem of the Way*, Chester Beatty Monographs No. 5, translated into English verse from the Arabic by A. J. Arberry, London 1952.

78 See: Ibid.

79 Cf. Badawi, 1982, 86.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 See: Kahle, “Marketszene aus einem egyptischen Schattenspiel”, in: *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 27 (1912), 92–102; Jacob, G., *Markttypen aus ‘Agîb wa-Ġarîb*, Erlangen 1907.

83 Badawi, 1982, 102.

This great diversity and vividness of settings and characters was presumably met by an equally intense reaction from viewers. In his poem, Ibn al-Farid also illustrates the audience's great excitement and highly emotional response, which creates a strong impression regarding the powerful influence of medieval shadow play in terms of its reception:⁸⁴

“Thou laughest gleefully, as the most gay
Of men rejoices; weep'st like a bereaved
And sorrowing mother, in profoundest grief;
Mournest, if they do moan, upon the loss
Of some great happiness; art jubilant,
If they do sing, for such sweet melody”.⁸⁵

As far as comedy is concerned, medieval Arabic shadow play has distinctive grotesque elements and visible ties to the fool's literature, where “physical deformity often went hand in hand with moral subnormality”.⁸⁶ In *tayf al-khayal*⁸⁷ (The Shadow Spirit), one of the three scripts of Ibn Daniyal, one of the main characters, *Tayf* (the spirit), is an ugly hunchback coming to Cairo to search for his friend Wisal, and finds that the Sultan of Egypt, Baybars (1260-1277),⁸⁸ has been prosecuting artists and closing down taverns and brothels, considering them immoral. “Tayf obliges his friend by reciting a long elegy on lamenting Satan, whom he calls *shaykhuna* (our master), and in it he expresses his yearning for the now forbidden pleasures of living, such as drinking and fornication, which he uninhibitedly describes in vivid detail”.⁸⁹ This element of crudity, which was already present in ancient Rome as Badawi observes,⁹⁰ brings to mind a prominent aspect of *Commedia dell'Arte* and even the practical jokes of Till Eulenspiegel, which were described by Enid Welsford as being “unspeakably gross and coarse and sometimes offensively brutal”.⁹¹ Another feature of medieval Arabic comedy within the realm of shadow theater is extreme obscenity. Just like Marvin Carlson,⁹² Badawi sees here a connection to classical Greek literature in which humor and obscenity come hand in hand:

“The connection between humour and the obscene is, in fact, a well known feature of classical literature from the early sources of Greek comedy in the Phallic dance to the more sophisticated world of Petronius' *Satyricon*. Equally, the sexual sources of humour are easily noticeable in the medieval Arabic

84 Cf. Badawi, 1982, 86–87.

85 Ibn al-Farid, “The Poem of the Way”, trans. A. J. Arberry, 1952, 68.

86 Badawi, 1982, 101.

87 Georg Jacob (Hg.), *Stücke aus Ibn Dānījāls Taif al-ḥajāl, für Vorlesungszwecke abgedruckt*, Einleitung, Heft 1, Ibn-Dāniyāl, Muḥammad, Erlangen 1910.

88 Badawi, 1982, 94.

89 Ibid. See also: Georg Jacob (Hg.), 1910, 14–15.

90 Cf. Badawi, 1982, 101.

91 Enid Welsford, *The fool; his social and literary history*, New York 1968, 51.

92 Carlson, 2013, f.n. 19.

literature. Recently in his useful study *The Mediaeval Islamic Underworld: the Banu Sasan in Arabic Society and Literature*, which discusses the literature dealing with the confraternity of tricksters, C. E. Bosworth has reminded us that one aspect of the new themes in Arabic literature of the ninth century, poetry and prose alike, was the vogue for the erotic and near pornographic”.⁹³

The said erotic element is especially remarkable considering the context in which this art and entertainment form was taking place, namely, a conservative Islamic setting. This contrast becomes more evident when we consider that scripts, which feature erotically intense content or deal substantively with erotic themes, as well as those satirizing religious language,⁹⁴ also present us with “qualities of a Dance Macabre”, and a closing chapter “underlying the need for repentance and purification from the sins of this world”.⁹⁵

This focus on pleasure can be seen as means of protest against strict religious conventions and teachings of asceticism. The idea of praising and even glorifying pleasure and the profane is historically present in both, east and west, as Islamic, conservative moral views do have parallels in the Judeo-Christian tradition. A similar act of defiance can be found in Voltaire’s 1736 poem *Le Mondain* (The Worldling or the Man of the World), in which he mocks Christianity and illustrates the necessity of consuming worldly pleasures instead of the promised after-life:

“Ce temps profane est tout fait pour mes mœurs. J’aime le luxe, et meme la mollesse,
Tous Jes plaisirs, Jes arts de toute espece,
La proprete, le gout, Jes ornements:
Tout honnete homme a de tels sentiments.
Il est bien doux pour mon coeur tres immonde De voir ici l’abondance a la ronde,
Mere des arts et des heureux travaux,
Nous apporter, de sa source feconde,
Et des besoins et des plaisirs nouveaux.
L’or de la terre et les tresors de l’onde,
Leurs habitants et Jes peuples de l’air,
Tout sert au luxe, aux plaisirs de ce monde.
O le bon temps que ce siecle de fer !
Le superflu, chose tres necessaire,
A reuni l’un et l’autre hemisphere”.⁹⁶

93 Badawi, 1982, 101. See also: C. E. Bosworth, *The Mediaeval Islamic Underworld: The Banu Sasan in Arabic Society and Literature*, vol. I, Leiden 1976, 30, 60 ff.

94 See Ibn Daniyal’s second play, *Ajib wa Gharib* (The Amazing Preacher and the Stranger), where “[t]he total effect is not unlike that of the French Sottie play, as we are made aware of the Fool or Clown behind each character we are watching. The keynote is struck by the first two characters to appear, particularly by the Amazing Preacher, Ajib, who gives what amounts to a “fool-sermon”, in which he uses the paraphernalia of religious sermons to instruct his followers in the mysteries of their trade as conmen and tricksters”. Badawi, 1982, 103. For the complete script see: Kahle, Paul, Hopwood, Derek (Ed.), *Three Shadow Plays by Ibn Daniyal* (bilingual edition), Cambridge 1992.

95 Badawi, 1982, 103.

96 Voltaire, “Le Mondain (1736)”, available at: https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Le_Mondain. 16. 11. 2022.

The well-known phrase “Le superflu, chose tres necessaire”⁹⁷ (“The superfluous, a very necessary thing”)⁹⁸ is a direct reference to carnal pleasure which was, and still is largely demonized by institutional religions.⁹⁹ Pleasure that, in Ibn Daniyal’s world, was being prosecuted by the state and labeled as immoral, even satanic.¹⁰⁰

Be it Muslim, Christian, Arab or western, no political regime wishes itself an impertinent puppet voicing critique in public, thereby stirring the masses and making a mockery out of the ruling class and its administrative and executive layers. And since Arabic shadow play relies heavily on social and political satire, often mocking the idea of censorship and aspects of authoritarianism, it has soon become an object of prosecution and censorship by Islamic and colonial powers alike, as I’m going to demonstrate next.

2.1.2 Censorship throughout the centuries

In the history of Arabic theater, the influence of shadow play is well documented, as well as its participatory aspects, which sometimes turn it into a threat for those who stand at the top of political and economic pyramid. Historically, Arabic shadow plays were evenings of entertainment, where “improvisation and interaction with the concerns of audiences were a regular feature”.¹⁰¹ The ability to both entertain and address public matters and sentiments made Arabic shadow theater a victim of authoritarian regimes: “Over the centuries, shadow theatre shows were repeatedly banned and the subject of police harassment (almost always under the pretext of obscenity, which usually meant simply overstepping the prevailing social norms)”.¹⁰²

Li Guo studies the records of medieval historian Ibn Iyas, which show that during the Mamluk period, precisely in 1451–2, Sultan Jaqmaq (r. 1438–53) banned shadow plays in Cairo and ordered its puppets to be burned.¹⁰³ Ibn Iyas also reports a shadow play prohibition in Istanbul around 1519 due to “public safety concerns”.¹⁰⁴ During the following centuries under Ottoman rule, then the European mandates in the Arabic region, shadow theater

97 German: Das Überflüssige, eine sehr notwendige Sache [Trans. Y. A.].

98 See: “Introduction” in “Le Mondain” – Critical edition by Haydn T. Mason, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, Volume 16, Oxford 2003.

99 Istvan Hont, “The early Enlightenment debate on commerce and Luxury” in: Mark Goldie; Robert Wokler (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, Cambridge 2008, 413–414.

100 Cf. Guo, 2020, 9.

101 Rubin et al. (Ed.) “Syria” in: *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre. (Arab world) Vol. 4*, New York 2003, 234–249, 235.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’* ii, 33; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Tibr* 353, quoted after Guo, Li, 2020, 9.

104 Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i’* v, 285, quoted after Guo, Li, 2020, 9.

practitioners were “exposed to regular and official harassment due to their stinging attacks on colonialism and occupation”.¹⁰⁵ The common charge, which, ironically, still applies today in many parts of the world under authoritarian regimes, was “disturbing the peace, which meant opposing the political status quo”.¹⁰⁶

Particularly notable for its “ironic portrayal of the relationship between power and morality”¹⁰⁷ in the early Mamluk-Cairo, Ibn Daniyal’s *tayf al-khayal*¹⁰⁸ (The Shadow Spirit) is a great example of Arabic shadow theater’s satirical response to censorship. Through its unmistakable sense of “satiric ambiguity”,¹⁰⁹ which utilizes inverted religious phrasing and many sophisticated puns, the play does not hesitate to mock both parties it represents: Moralists and libertines.¹¹⁰ The story opens with Tayf (The Shadow Spirit), one of its two main characters, lamenting the plight of the Cairo he came back to, while drawing a pretty grim picture of the times in question:

“When, however, I repented of these character traits, [...] and returned from Mosul to the confines of Egypt during the Zahir dynasty, I found these traces effaced. I found old familiar places unwelcoming and what was once there, gone [...] This was because the command of the sultan had destroyed the army of Satan. The tongues of sinners were held still, and wine-bowls and wine-jugs were shattered. Depravity was suffering the utmost hardship, and a wine-seller was crucified with a wine-jug around his neck”.¹¹¹

2.1.3 Highly subversive, almost religious

In his uniquely obscure language, Ibn Daniyal portrays both “forceful attempts to reform the society” and “the manner in which that society reacted”.¹¹² His characters are not particularly anti-religious, yet they voice a protest against absolutism and radical morality politics, which can only result in depriving them of pleasures they regard as essential, or as historian Amila Buturović puts it: “Ibn Daniyal’s characters articulate their libertine longings as an existential need denied by the political regime”.¹¹³

105 Rubin et al. (Ed.), 2003, 235.

106 Ibid.

107 Cyrus Ali Zargar, “The Satiric Method of Ibn Dāniyāl: Morality and Anti-Morality in ‘Ṭayf al-Khayāl’”, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37/1, 2006, 68–108, 68.

108 Kahle (Ed.), 1992.

109 Zargar, 2006, 69.

110 Cf. Ibid.

111 Kahle (Ed.), 1992, 4–5, translation by Cyrus Ali Zargar, “The Satiric Method of Ibn Dāniyāl: Morality and Anti-Morality in ‘Ṭayf al-Khayāl’”, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37/1, 2006, 68–108, 71. I have decided to use Zargar’s translation after comparing it to the original Arabic script in: Jacob (Ed.), Erlangen 1910, 14–15.

112 Zargar, 2006, 73.

113 Amila Buturović, “Sociology of Popular Drama in Mediaeval Egypt: Ibn Dāniyāl and his shadow plays”, Dissertation, McGill University Institute of Islamic Studies 1993, 181.

One of the main techniques Ibn Daniyal uses to satirize repressive regimes is playing with language, thereby inverting religious vocabulary or using it in unusual ways for purposes of ridicule. Yet his sarcasm is not exclusive to one party, it is rather directed to all radical elements with a rather vague attitude, thus avoiding any act of patronizing the audience by dictating certain views or favoring a way of life over another: “By ridiculing these two opposing social tendencies and by failing to express openly a desirable third option, Ibn Daniyal leaves his audience with a clear idea of what is ridiculous but without a definitive moral stance”.¹¹⁴ Prince Wisal, the second main character in *tayf al-khayal*, is a repenting head of state with an immoral past for which he is deeply nostalgic.¹¹⁵ This contradiction is expressed by Tayf, the other main character, in the form of a warning:

“Be quiet! He might hear you and be offended! He’ll slap you, because, nowadays, he is not of such an amiable temperament. He has become more powerful than the Pharaoh. He went away and became as irascible as a panther; he has exceeded the limits and behaves tyrannically.¹¹⁶ He throws people into prison and releases them from it, and he keeps the mace at hand”.¹¹⁷

In likening prince Wisal to one of the most prominent “Quranic depictions of despotism”,¹¹⁸ a Pharaoh, Ibn Daniyal is voicing some of his harshest, probably most daring critique of authoritarian rule in Islamic medieval times, where Pharaohs represented the worst and utmost gruesome form of tyranny.

In addition to various allusions to the Quran and Islamic terminology, the hidden humor becomes more obvious when we consider the name of “prince terrible” (Wisal): An Arabic term for interaction between lovers; a connection that is often sexual.¹¹⁹ After all, this is a play that opens with Iblis (Satan) being labeled as “shaykhuna”¹²⁰ (our sheikh: religious master),¹²¹ which speaks of the ironic tone that characterizes Ibn Daniyal’s work.

114 Zargar, 2006, 70.

115 Cf. Zargar, 2006, 99.

116 Zargar observes that “[t]he wording here alludes to the Quranic account of God’s command to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh! For truly he has exceeded the limits”. (20:24) The likening of Wisal, a Mamluk, to the Quranic epitome of tyranny, the Pharaoh, connects ironically a tyrannical ruler of Egypt’s past to any or all of the rulers of Egypt contemporary to Ibn Daniyal”. Zargar, 2006, f.n. 88.

117 Kahle (Ed.), 1992, 23, trans. Zargar, 2006, 99.

118 Zargar, 2006, 107.

119 Zargar observes that “Emir Wisal’s name literally means the ‘Emir Coitus,’ a name that also has ironic mystical implications due to the use of the word *wisal* in Sufi love poetry”. Zargar, 2006, f.n. 90.

120 Jacob (Hg.), Erlangen 1910, 15.

121 Cf. Badawi, 1982, 94. See also: Jacob (Hg.), 1910, 15.

2.2 Relevance and status today

The idea that Arabic theatricality constitutes a very long, uninterrupted chain may be difficult to verify empirically, as one would be addressing a topic which has ancient roots, and concerns a region with a history that is exceptionally full of change and turmoil. Compared to the Turkish Karagöz, Arabic shadow theater is poorly documented, as Arab countries were long colonized by the Ottomans,¹²² and much of this art form has been lost, classified as Turkish or even non-existent. Li Guo points this out in *Arabic Shadow Theatre, 1300–1900*¹²³ and hopes that his research

“will assist museum curators concerned with cataloguing Arabic shadow play artifacts, which to this day remains mostly an on-going process. Among these, the shadow puppets collection Paul Kahle purchased in Egypt, the finest of its kind, had long been taken apart. Kahle donated some items to various German museums and left the rest to family members, some of which probably will end up on the art market. The number of puppets in these museums needs to be determined, and the items adequately catalogued. The same goes for other Arab shadow play collections housed in museums and research institutes all over the world”.¹²⁴

In Syria, shadow theater is a prominent example of a traditional art form which survived the centuries, with roots striking deep into the memory of Syrian communities and having a significant social and cultural meaning. In 1900 Enno Littmann wrote:

“Der Karagoz (entsprechend dem türkischen Karagöz) und seine Schnurren sind, wie ich durch meine Nachforschungen an Ort und Stelle erfuhr, auch im islamischen Syrien ziemlich weit verbreitet. Der europäische Reisende, der fast immer christliche Orientalen um sich hat, bekommt allerdings gewöhnlich wenig davon zu hören, da die meisten Christen entweder selbst Nichts von dem Vorhandensein dieser Theater wissen [...]. Eigentlich lebendig ist Karagoz nur bei den Muhammedanern, und daher ist die Heimat der meisten Karakozatis (oder Hayalati = türk. Hayalgi) Damascus, wo das orientalische Leben noch kräftig pulsiert”.¹²⁵

As a popular art form and a means of political resistance, Syrian shadow theater has found its way to television since the 1980s. The topic was employed in several historical dramas, telling the stories of shadow theater artists during the Ottoman period, in an attempt to highlight the shadow play's important role in stripping power relations and practicing social and political criticism.¹²⁶ Pannewick points out that “[g]erade in Zeiten politischer Zensur eignete sich die allegorische Verwendung von Schatteneffekten auf der Bühne als Ausdruck indirekter Kritik an bestehenden Machtverhältnissen”,¹²⁷ thereby recognizing the great

122 Between the 14th and early 20th centuries.

123 Guo, 2020, 11.

124 Ibid.

125 Enno Littmann, “Ein arabisches Karagöz-spiel”, in: *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft: ZDMG*, 54 (1900), 661–80, 661–662.

126 Among others *Safar/Journey* by Hatem Ali, 1998.

127 Pannewick, 2000, 165.

potential of this pre-modern form and its incredible longevity, which makes it an important aspect of Arabic theatricality that has been able to stand the test of time: “Die vielfältigen, aktuellen Realisierungen der Schattenspieltechnik deuten auf die zeitgenössische Relevanz dieser Kunstform hin, die in nahezu allen hier vorliegenden Beiträgen zur Theatralitätsdebatte als konstitutives Element arabischer Theatralität gewertet wird”.¹²⁸

In his writings about Arabic drama, Roger Allen joins Pannewick in recognizing the way in which some of the earliest Arabic dramatic forms “retained their popularity throughout the premodern era and remained a source of inspiration for playwrights into the modern period, particularly for those who endeavoured to combine some of the effects of Brechtian dramatic theory with a search into the heritage of the Arab past for inspiration”.¹²⁹ In fact, Ibn Daniyal’s satire of authoritarian rule, moral tyranny and hypocrisy has been inspiring Arab playwrights since the sixties, after his work was published in Cairo in 1963.¹³⁰ One of the most prominent Arabic plays *al farafir*¹³¹ (The Flipflap) which was written by Yusuf Idris in 1964 is heavily inspired by Ibn Daniyal’s *ajib wa gharib*¹³² (Strange and Curious).¹³³ In the 1970s, Syrian dramatist Saadallah Wannous found in Ibn Daniyal “a symbolic point of reference through which to trace a non-European, indigenous, and authentically Arab ancestry to their own avant-garde”.¹³⁴ This impact carries on all the way to the 1990s, echoing in the work of Egyptian troupe El Warsha, which was founded in 1987 and worked intensively to revive Arabic shadow theater and the plays of Ibn Daniyal.

The strong and long-lived impact of Arabic pre-modern theatrical forms/dramatic public events is obvious today, with figures such as the *hakawati* (story-teller) being constantly invoked by Arab artists. Roger Allen refers to Edward Lane’s 1860s records of the Cairene everyday life¹³⁵ and his description of the story-tellers who “would accompany themselves on

128 Pannewick, 2000, 166.

129 Allen, “Drama”, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Arabic-literature/Drama>, 23. 11. 2022.

130 Ibrahim Ḥamāda, *Khayāl al-ẓill wa-tamthīliyyāt Ibn Dāniyāl* (Shadow theater and the plays of ibn Daniyal), Cairo 1963.

131 Yusuf Idris, *Al-Farafir* (The Flipflap), Cairo 1964.

132 Kahle, (Ed.), 1992.

133 Cf. Anna Della Subin and Hussein Omar, “First As Shadow, Then As Farce: An Evening with Medieval Puppeteer Ibn Daniyal”, *Arablit & Arablit Quarterly*, April 22, 2013, <https://arablit.org/2013/04/22/first-as-shadow-then-as-farce-an-evening-with-medieval-puppeteer-ibn-daniyal/>, 02. 12. 2022. See also: S. Wannous’s introduction to Ḥijāzī, Ḥ.S., *Khayāl al-ẓill wa-aṣl al-masraḥ al-‘Arabī* (Shadow play and the origins of Arabic theater), Damascus 1994.

134 Ibid.

135 Edward Lane, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, New York 2005. In the *Cambridge Guide to World Theatre* we read: “Already at the end of the 9th century, a celebrated Arabian story-teller. Ibn al-Magazili, had begun to introduce dramatic elements and characterization into his performances. By the 11th century it had crystallized into a literary genre: The *maqama* [fine poetry, on which the medieval Arabic

musical instruments and would gesticulate at appropriate points in the narrative” concluding: “That several contemporary playwrights should invoke the figure of the hakawātī in order to provide a Brechtian distancing mechanism to their dramas and that a prominent group of Palestinian actors should call themselves the Hakawātī Troupe is clearly no accident”.¹³⁶ And while censorship and prosecution accompanied political art in the Arabic world throughout the centuries, political art maintained its ancient techniques, such as word play and direct and ambiguous satire all the way till the present. Puns, double entendres, phonetic mix-ups, and uncommon linguistic forms have since been prominent traits in Arabic political comedy, and an important tool of some of its most influential protagonists, whose work has influenced several generations. Such is the case with the texts of Mohamad Al-Maghout and the plays of Ziad Al-Rahbani, which will be looked at in the course of this research.

3. Arabic Operetta Between Conservatives and Colonists

Encouraged by a liberal reformist who took interest in commerce and culture alike,¹³⁷ Ahmad Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani (c. 1833–1902)¹³⁸ relied on the support of Midhat Pasha, Ottoman provincial ruler and governor of Syria¹³⁹ to establish the first theater house in Damascus in 1865.¹⁴⁰ There, Al-Qabbani himself filled in multiple positions: From writing to composing, acting and managing technical matters of decoration, lighting and make-up.¹⁴¹ His troupe featured Muslim, Christian and Jewish actors and singers, who were prominent in establishing Arabic theater.¹⁴² Theater critic Al-Maleh notes that Al-Qabbani’s stagings were “huge successes”,¹⁴³ and his theater soon “became a phenomenon and one that greatly influenced

shadow play was based. Additional note: Y. A.] at the hands of Badi 'IZ-Zaman al-Hamadani and expanded by al-Hanri”. William O. Beeman, “Theater in the Middle East” in: Martin Banham (Ed.), *Cambridge Guide to World Theatre*, Cambridge 1988, 664–676, 665.

136 Allen, 2000, 196.

137 Pasha supported press and theater, but was also bent on building roads and establishing local projects in the Levant. See: Abd al-‘Azīz Dūrī, *The Historical Formation of the Arab Nation: A Study in Identity and Consciousness*, New York 1987, 165–166; Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876*. Princeton 1963, 397. The impact of Pasha’s policies on different aspects of life in Damascus was strong and is quite memorable. There, the Midhat Pasha Souq still carries his name. See: Michael Provence, “Late Ottoman State Education“, in: J. Rgen Nielsen; Jørgen S. Nielsen, *Religion, Ethnicity and Contested Nationhood in the Former Ottoman Space*, Leiden; Boston 2012, 117.

138 For bibliographical info see: Muhammad Yusuf Nagm, *al-Masrahiya fi al-adab al-arabi al-hadith* (Theater play in modern Arabic literature), Beirut 1956; Regina Karachouli, “Abu Halil Al-Qabbānī (1833-1902)-Damaszener Theatergründer und Prinzipal“, *Die Welt des Islams* 32/1, 1992.

139 See: Thomas Philipp; Birgit Schaebler (Ed.), *The Syrian Land: Processes of Integration and Fragmentation: Bilād Al-Shām from the 18th to the 20th Century*, Stuttgart 1998, 260.

140 Rubin et al. (Ed.), 2003, 237.

141 Cf. Karachouli, 1992, 86.

142 Cf. Karachouli, 1992, 84.

143 Rubin et al. (Ed.), 2003, 237.

Damascus social life”.¹⁴⁴ This popularity was the result of vivid musicals with rich visual settings that spoke to everyone, creating an audience “das sich durch die dargestellten Szenen und die musikalischen Darbietungen unmittelbar angesprochen fühlte”,¹⁴⁵ Pannewick observes. Among other classical sources of Arabic literature, Al-Qabbani adapted stories from the *Thousand and One Nights*,¹⁴⁶ which featured prominent Arab leaders such as caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. This is said to have angered the conservative religious elites in Damascus, who were “already deeply suspicious of the permissibility and probity of this new medium”,¹⁴⁷ so much that they formed a delegation and headed to Istanbul to pursue a decree banning Al-Qabbani from staging in Syria.¹⁴⁸ Early 1880s saw Damascus’s first theater getting closed, looted and burned down.¹⁴⁹ Al-Qabbani then accepted the invitation of Egyptian singer Abduh al-Hamuli (1841–1901),¹⁵⁰ who had visited Damascus in 1883, and headed to Alexandria together with his ensemble to start a whole new chapter.¹⁵¹

Meanwhile, Egypt was on a completely different track than the Levant. Under khedive Ismā‘īl who came to power in 1863, the country enjoyed relative independence from the Ottomans and was set to be rapidly modernized, resembling the west in every aspect possible.¹⁵² The khedive expanded the capital and built an opera house,¹⁵³ and foreign troupes “regularly performed plays on an open-air stage in the newly refurbished Ezbekiyya Gardens”¹⁵⁴ nearby. Alongside America, Egypt became a major destination for many, since the construction of the Suez Canal had opened up new sources of material prosperity, literature, arts and journalism had found great liberality.¹⁵⁵ Since the 1870s, a professional local theater was being established, hosting migrants from Europe and the Levant, most prominently among the Arab artists were Salim an-Naqqash (d. 1884), Adib Ishaq (d. 1885), Yusuf al-Khayyat (d. 1900) and Sulaiman al-Qurdahi (d. 1909).¹⁵⁶

144 Ibid.

145 Pannewick, 2000, 116.

146 Ibn al-Muqaffa’ (Ed.), *Alf laila wa laila* (Thousand and One Nights), Bulaq, Cairo 1935.

147 Allen, 2000, 197.

148 Cf. Ibid

149 The exact date is unclear, some point to 1884 (see: Karachouli 1992, 88), others to 1881 (see: Rubin et al., 2003, 237).

150 ‘Abduh al-Ḥāmūlī, Foundation for Arab Music Archiving and Research (AMAR), <https://www.amar-foundation.org/abduh-al-hamuli/>, 25. 11. 2022.

151 Cf. Karachouli, 1992, 88.

152 Cf. Allen, 2000, 197.

153 See: Paolo Petrocelli, *The Evolution of Opera Theatre in the Middle East and North Africa*, Cambridge 2019.

154 Allen, 2000, 197.

155 Cf. Rainer Hermann, *Kulturkrise und konservative Erneuerung. Muhammad Kurd Ali (1876–1953) und das geistige Leben in Damaskus zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt a. M. 1990, 53–66.

156 Cf. Karachouli, 1992, 88f.

Al-Qabbani received a warm welcome and his work was highly celebrated in Egypt. Already on the second evening after his arrival in Alexandria he performed the play *Harun ar-Rashid ma' Uns al-galis*¹⁵⁷ in the coffee house “ad-Danub”¹⁵⁸ (The Danube). An invitation to this performance in the prominent newspaper *Al-Ahram*, June 23, 1884 reads: “The troupe consists of the most skillful masters of acting, including a group of musicians and singers whose tones are ear-pleasing as they are heart-opening [Trans. Y. A.]”.¹⁵⁹

But the cosmopolitan orientation had a shadow side: As everyone was competing for prominent stages, government attention and financial support, Arab artists were seldom granted the same privileges European artists and troupes had.¹⁶⁰ Staging exclusively in Arabic and with traditional content, Al-Qabbani and his companions had to fight for similar treatment, shouldering their way among French and Italian stage artists. In the following pages I will be illustrating that point by observing Al-Qabbani’s efforts to stage at the Cairene Opera House, but first I would like to expand on the hostile reaction the artist was faced with at home, and the underlying conditions which led to the general ban and even the burning of his theater in Damascus.

3.1 Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani and the Damascene fundamentalists

Headed by sheikh Said Al-Ghabra, a delegation of Damascene conservatives brought charges against Al-Qabbani to Ahmed Hamdi Pasha, governor of Damascus (1880–1885)¹⁶¹ for the “heretic” and “immoral”¹⁶² content, Al-Qabbani’s stagings featured. This furious response to some of Al-Qabbani’s plays, which led to the complete ban and then burning of his theater in Damascus, can be interpreted as an act of religious vengeance, which is not unusual in the overwhelmingly religious Middle East. Interestingly though, “a reading of al-Qabbani’s eight plays reveals nothing that could or should have provoked such strong reactions”.¹⁶³ In fact, Al-Qabbani himself comes from a religious, Muslim family, and is an accomplished Koran student who spent his youth in study-circles of Damascene mosques,¹⁶⁴ eventually gaining the

157 Ismail, 2017, 287–338.

158 Karachouli, 1992, 89.

159 Muhammad Yusuf Nagm, *al-masrahiya fi al-adab al-arabi al-hadith* (Theater play in modern Arabic literature), Beirut 1956, 115f. The German translation of the invitation by Arabist and cultural studies scholar Regina Karachouli reads: “Die Truppe besteht aus den geschicktesten Meistern in den Arten und Methoden des Schauspiels, darunter einer Gruppe von Musikanten und Sängern, die zu hören das Ohr erfreut und die Brust öffnet”. Karachouli, 1992, 89.

160 See: Ismail, 2017, 65.

161 Weismann, Zachs, et al. (Ed.), *Ottoman Reform and Muslim Regeneration*, London, 2005, 111.

162 Adil Abu Shanab, “hayat abi khalil al-qabbani” (The Life of Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani) in: *al-mauqif al-adabi*, 89, Damascus 1978, 102, quoted after Karachouli, 1992, 87.

163 Rubin et al. (Ed.), 2003, 237.

164 Cf. Karachouli, 1992, 84.

title ‘sheikh’, which, in Syria and Egypt, refers to a Muslim religious scholar.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, a sheikh has a certain dress-code (a small turban and a long coat) indicating his education/position. Available pictures of Al-Qabbani show that he was committed to the sheikh attire and general appearance.¹⁶⁶ This drew the attention of the correspondent of American newspaper *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, who described him as a “solemn, long coated fellow”,¹⁶⁷ in his extensive review about one of Al-Qabbani’s stagings in The Chicago World’s Fair in 1893. Finally, in numerous reviews about Al-Qabbani’s work in the Egyptian press, the artist is almost exclusively referred to as *hadrat-al-fadel-al-shaykh* (the virtuous sheikh),¹⁶⁸ which makes the accusation regarding heretic and immoral content in his plays rather futile.¹⁶⁹ On the political and social level, the man wasn’t exactly confrontational either, Karachouli observes: “Dabei scheint al-Qabbani ein eher vorsichtig politisch zurückhaltender Künstler gewesen zu sein, ein Realist der sich durchaus bewußt war, dass er über verminten Bode ging und sich hütete, die wechselnden Behörden durch kritische Anwürfe zu provozieren”.¹⁷⁰ So why did Damascene conservatives wage war at Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani and his theater?

In addition to caliph Harun Al-Rashid, Al-Qabbani’s stagings featured prominent Muslim figures such as Nur ad-Din Zengi,¹⁷¹ a ruler of the Zangid dynasty, who led victorious counterattacks against Crusaders in the Middle East and was highly revered by Damascene mystics.¹⁷² It is possible to assume that this act could have caused the said upheaval, especially in a conservative, 19th century Muslim setting, where “the mere presence of represented kings and princes on a stage can diminish their stature and dignity”.¹⁷³ In a lengthy examination of this point, Pannewick supports the thesis of Syrian intellectual and playwright Sadallah Wannous,¹⁷⁴ regarding the actual reason behind this outrage, arguing that feudal elites used religion as “Deckmantel für reale machpolitischen Ansprüche”.¹⁷⁵

165 Whereas in the Arabian Peninsula, the title is used in reference to heads of tribes and their relatives.

166 See fig. 1 in appendix.

167 V. D. H. (correspondent of the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*) “Turkish Play Outlined”, *The Galveston Daily News*, Texas, Wednesday, May 24, 1893, 6.

168 Documented by Nagm, 1956, 115f and Ismail, 2017, 139–283.

169 Unlike the case with the scripts of Ibn Daniyal (see previous chapter).

170 Karachouli, 1992, 90–91.

171 Zengi was depicted in Al-Qabbani’s second play, *Atrashan wa ward Al jinan*. See: Taissier Khalaf, *nash’at al masrah fi biladisham 1847–1917* (the birth of theater in the Levant 1847–1917), Sharjah 2018.

172 See: Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades, Volume II: The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East*, Cambridge 1952.

173 Rubin et al. (Ed.), 2003, 237.

174 Saadallah Wannous, “limada waqafat ar-ragiya didd abi khalil al-qabbani?” (Why did reactionaries stand against Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani) in: *bayanat li masrah arabi gadid* (Manifests for a new Arabic Theater), Beirut 1988 (1970¹ in: *Al-Ma’rifa* Nr. 104), 59–77.

175 Pannewick, 2000, 114.

Pannewick also observes a very topical motivation in the religious elites' anxiety: "Wenn das Publikum heute seinen Spaß daran findet, einen auf der Bühne hilflos stolpernden oder stotternden Herscher mit Hohn und Spott zu überschütten, wer hinderte es dann morgen daran, über die komische Darstellung aktueller Herrschergestalten zu lachen?"¹⁷⁶

In fact, Wannous's thesis sounds especially plausible considering the popularity of Al-Qabbani's plays. The artist was the first to introduce complete musicals based on Arabic Literature to a vast audience,¹⁷⁷ leaving "room in his productions for improvisation and interaction with audiences. Thus, the theatrical presentation became a social event in which the audience learned to become active and socially critical".¹⁷⁸ This participatory feature could have been considered an imminent danger for the powerful, religious men, fearing the possibility of losing control over the masses, who were being exposed to new narratives and forms of expression that do not shy from depicting icons. Additionally, those new social events enabled a type of collective action that is far more threatening than the texts they are based on: "Aus diesem Zusammenspiel von Darbietenden und Publikum ergab sich ein Theaterstil, der viel Raum für Improvisationen und Publikumseingriffe ließ und insofern weit über den zugrundeliegenden Text hinausging".¹⁷⁹

In an extensive review¹⁸⁰ about one of the plays that were presented by The Oriental Odeon, which was lead by Al-Qabbani in The Chicago World's Fair (World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. May 1, 1893–October 30, 1893),¹⁸¹ American newspaper *The Galveston Daily News* covers all aspects of the show which seems to have been highly vivid, rich in symbolism and keen on destroying the fourth wall.¹⁸² In the overfilled theater of the "Turkish

¹⁷⁶ Pannewick, 2000, 117.

¹⁷⁷ See: Rubin et al. (Ed.), 2003, 237; Ismail, 2017, 30.

¹⁷⁸ Rubin et al. (Ed.), 2003, 237.

¹⁷⁹ Pannewick, 2000, 116.

¹⁸⁰ V. D. H., *The Galveston Daily News*, 1893, 6. See also: *The Pittsburgh Post* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), Sat, Jan 14, 1893.

¹⁸¹ In the newspaper, *Kawkab America* (The Star of America) we read: "The Oriental Theatre Company numbering 54 people, and under the direction of Mr. Butros Tanious arrived this week at the U.S. Immigration Bureau. Several Oriental specialists from various parts of Turkey have been secured in order to give the American public a correct idea of the customs and manners of the people in different parts of the Empire. The members of the company have taken special pains for accurate reproduction of "Eastern Life." The famous Arabic composer and actor Sheikh Abou Khalil Kabany has the stage management of the plays and pieces which are to be presented to World's Fair visitors in true and beautiful Oriental style. We understand that people from Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Mt. Lebanon, Constantinople, Anatolia, Arabia, Syria and Palestine will take part in the performance of the Oriental Theatre of the Turkish section. "The orient at fair" in: *Kawkab America* Vol. 2. No. 55, New York, Friday, April 28, 1893, quoted after Khalaf, 2018, 134f.

¹⁸² Cf. Khalaf, 2018, 67.

village”,¹⁸³ which could accommodate up to 2000 viewers,¹⁸⁴ a modern opera was conducted, in which the following scene is described:

“In the next act you can contemplate the woes of the beautiful Abla (Rosa), whose heart very naturally yearns for the lover her father has refused. She enters, hand in hand with a confidant, both singing, advancing and retreating in hops, skips and jumps. She then details her love and hopes and plans to the confidant [...]. The confidant appears to give her bad advice for she likes it; and, just as both girls are indulging in great delight over the solution of a difficult problem, a good-looking Arab breaks in on their session and tries to make violent love to Abla. Abla stands it as long as she can and then, by a well-directed blow in the chest, knocks the insistent fellow down. Amid great applause she contemplates her achievement, then drags off her confidant, leaving the chagrined lover to excuse his defeat as best as he can to the audience”.¹⁸⁵

This scene shows clearly one of the ways in which Al-Qabbani’s stage allowed for interaction between actors and audience, an aspect that was found deploring by most of the American theater artists and critics of the time, who would mostly prefer an absolute commitment to more classical forms of theatricality.¹⁸⁶ Through this new, interactive possibility to address a large number of people, delivering messages about the present through a story from the past, Al-Qabbani was crossing the border of entertainment into the political, or as Karachouli puts it: “Indem al-Qabbani die neue Kunst praktizierte, betrat er zu gleicher Zeit außerkünstlerisches Terrain”.¹⁸⁷

3.2 Arabic theater in a European Egypt

Al-Qabbani’s misfortune in Damascus was followed by a prosperous chapter in Egypt. Following in the footsteps of Salim Al Naqqash,¹⁸⁸ who was the first to stage in Arabic there,¹⁸⁹ his theater addressed a large, diverse audience, “das neben der Oberschicht auch das

183 As the exhibition management insisted to call it. In Arabic the section was advertised as *masrah al 'adat al sharqiya* (theater of oriental customs). According to Syrian author and historian T. Khalaf, the reason for this discrepancy in titles goes back to in 1890, when designer and architect Daniel H. Burnham laid out a plan for an “ideal city” in neoclassical style to be named “The White City”, which was intended to represent western, industrialized countries in the Columbian Exposition. On the fringes, a one-mile-long street named “Midway Plaisance” was designated for entertainment events embodying folk cultures in their various stages of development. This entertainment street was a part of anthropology section in the exhibition, headed by Frederic Ward Putnam, professor of ethnology at Harvard University and lead curator. Putnam’s evolutionary perceptions prevailed over the concept of “Midway Plaisance” and most investment franchises were granted according to these perceptions, among which “The Turkish Village” and “Turkish Theater”. Cf. Khalaf, 2018, 18. Here it is important to point out that Ottoman documents do not include the term “Turkish” whatsoever, and that it was not until 1922 that the term was used by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as he formed the republic of Turkey. See: Khalaf, 2018, f.n. 3.

184 Cf. V. D. H., *The Galveston Daily News*, 1893, 6.

185 Ibid.

186 Cf. Khalaf, 2018, 71.

187 Karachouli, 1992, 95.

188 Nephew of Marun Al Naqqash (1855–1817), the first to produce play texts in Arabic, see: M. M. Badawi, *Early Arabic Drama*, Cambridge 1988, 43–44.

189 “We have been brought the art of acting by some of the best Syrian artists, such as Al-Naqqash, Adib Ishaq and Al-Khayat [...] And they were very successful in creating the basis for that art and establishing it with

einfache Volk in Stadt und Land erfagßte”.¹⁹⁰ Al-Qabbani toured all over Egypt: From Théâtre Européen Zizinia in Alexandria¹⁹¹ to countryside stages in Tanta, then settled down in Cairo, where he rented “Al-Bulitiama” theater house. Egyptian theater scholar Ismail observes that the great success of Al-Qabbani’s Bulitiama stagings affected the popularity of European troupes in Ezbekiyya Gardens negatively.¹⁹² This may be due to the fact that Al-Qabbani’s theater presented the audience with unique content based on classical Arabic literature: “[Er] ließ sich stofflich-thematisch von der Volksliteratur und den Glanzzeiten der arabischen Geschichte inspirieren”,¹⁹³ thereby rivaling foreign presence in the Egyptian cultural scene.

Moreover, Al-Qabbani staged exclusively in literary Arabic, at a time when Arabic language was being suppressed by colonial powers that sought to impose English as the main language of education in Egypt.¹⁹⁴ The use of literary Arabic was also being sharply criticized by many Egyptians in favor of the colloquial language, with some voices going as far as to attribute the “Egyptians’ backwardness and impotence [Trans. Y. A.]”¹⁹⁵ to their adherence to the classical Arabic, and calling for adopting the colloquial as a language for scientific and literary authorship.¹⁹⁶ In this context, Al-Qabbani’s theater aspired to revive traditional Arabic art forms such as *al-Muwashshah* (poetic and musical genre) and the oriental *Samah* dance.¹⁹⁷ The result was a content touching on both the present and the past, in an attempt to address matters of cultural identity. The plays presented the audience with an indirect, yet strongly suggestive images reflecting on contemporary social-political reality, as Karachouli observes: “So ist die Gestalt des gerechten, demokratischen Herrschers Harun ar-Rashid auch als Gegenbild und indirekter Protest gegen die Despotie eines ‘Abd al-Hamid zu verstehen”.¹⁹⁸ This important aspect in which Al-Qabbani’s theater differentiated itself from European and adapted stagings did not make the artist’s life any easier, especially considering a political and cultural climate that is almost entirely dominated by Ottomans and Europeans, as the following incident suggests.

their own hands. [Trans. Y. A.]”, Muḥammad Taymūr (Egyptian author and founder of fiction and theatrical literature in Egypt), quoted after Ismail, 2017, 22.

190 Karachouli, 1992, 95.

191 For more on the history of Théâtre Européen Zizinia see: Philip Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century: 1799-1882*, Reading 1996; Petrocelli, Cambridge 2019.

192 Ismail, 2017, 65.

193 Karachouli, 1992, 91.

194 Particularly after the British conquest of Egypt (1882), also known as the Anglo-Egyptian War.

195 Ismail, 2017, 30.

196 Ibid.

197 See: Nagm, 1956, 117.

198 Karachouli, 1992, 96.

In 1884, Al-Qabbani requested permission to stage at the Cairo's Khedivial Opera House, where, up to that date, only European artists and troupes were allowed to perform.¹⁹⁹ It remains unclear, whether Al-Qabbani actually attained his goal: Some scholars insist he did,²⁰⁰ others argue that he couldn't have, as Egyptian authorities continued putting hurdles in his way and were determined on keeping Arabic artists out of the opera house.²⁰¹

Ismail argues that, by focusing on the importance of reviving Arabic language and tradition, Al-Qabbani's theatrical message did not accommodate the tendencies of European powers dominating Egyptian government at the time, concluding that the opera house did not open its doors to him after all.²⁰² Ismail arrives at this after studying all available articles about Al-Qabbani in the Egyptian press, which did not mention such staging, at a time when the popular artists' news were so frequent in all newspapers, which hardly missed reporting about or commenting on any of his stagings in various Egyptian regions, no matter how remote or insignificant.²⁰³ Speaking of hurdles and hardships the artist faced after submitting his "bald request"²⁰⁴ to stage at the Cairene opera house, a request by Al-Qabbani and singer Abdo Al-Hamouli to the "Ministry of Public Affairs" submitted in 15.12.1884 reads:

"For the attention of his highness, Minister of Public Works [addressee's title in Turkish, no name]: As we submitted our application for permission to stage in the opera house, we have also requested that the government grant us its support in the matter of gas lighting. Then, due to the urgency of the request, and considering the approval which was granted to European actors, we requested a permission to stage regardless of the gaslight matter. This was based on our belief that such an accelerated permission should not impede another request regarding lighting matters to be submitted later, as was the case with European colleagues, and our great trust in the fairness of your highness, to provide native actors with the same, kind support, which they sorely need. [Trans. Y. A.]"²⁰⁵

Ismail explains the document as follows: End of 1884, Al-Qabbani and singer Abdo Al-Hamouli submitted an application to the Khedewal Opera House to stage there in January 1885. When this was approved, the artists were encouraged to submit another request regarding the cost of lighting to be covered by the government, as is the case with foreign

199 Built in 1869, the opera house hosted the premiere of Verdi's *Aida*, it burned down in 1971. See: Raphael Cormack, "Life was a cabaret – the Roaring Twenties in Cairo", *Apollo, the international art magazine*, January, 2020, available at: <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/roaring-twenties-cairo/>, 03. 12. 2022. See also: Petrocelli, 2019; Ismail, 2017.

200 see: Nagm, 1956, 401.

201 Cf. Ismail, 2017, 72.

202 Ismail, 2017, 72.

203 Cf. Ismail, 2017, 73.

204 Ismail, 2017, 72.

205 Egyptian National Archives, Council of Ministers, Ministry of Public Works, wallet (1–2), quoted after Ismail, 2017, 72.

troupes. Meanwhile, one of these troupes obtained a permission to stage at the Opera House starting February of the same year.

Still waiting for a response regarding lighting cost application, Al-Qabbani decided to drop that request on 24. 12. 1884, fearing that it may lead to the revocation of the staging permission, especially after another foreign troupe has been granted permission to stage at the opera house within a very short time, right after the troupe of Al-Qabbani.²⁰⁶ The end result of this correspondence is not very clear, but the letter clearly shows that foreign troupes were highly privileged, and that the Arabic troupe of Al-Qabbani felt threatened by that and demanded similar treatment.

3.3 Al-Qabbani's impact and the endurance of his message

In his book about the origins of theater in the Levant,²⁰⁷ Syrian historian Taissier Khalaf explains the role of Levantine theater as a historical witness to various social and political changes, which took place in the region during the final decades of the Ottoman Empire. Khalaf observes that although Al-Qabbani was not the first to stage in the region, he is still regarded as “father”²⁰⁸ and pioneer, as those preceding him were mainly concerned with entertaining the elites, which means that their audience was not only limited but also private.²⁰⁹ Such were the stagings of Marun Al-Naqqash (1855–1817),²¹⁰ who had seen Italian and French performances during a tour in Europe and went back to stage in Beirut between 1847 and 1853.²¹¹ Al-Naqqash's plays were directed to a very specific class consisting of foreign consuls, pashas, and a number of prominent wealthy people.²¹²

Al-Naqqash's nephew, Salim, carried on his uncle's theatrical activity and formed the first Arabic theater troupe in 1876,²¹³ which was, however, very short lived.²¹⁴ Consequently, theater as form did not begin to attain popularity among Arabic masses until Al-Qabbani's stagings started taking over shadow play and other public entertainment forms, which have by

206 Cf. Sayed Ali Ismail, *tarikh al masrah fil 'alam al 'arabi* (History of Theater in the Arabic World), Windsor 2012, 74f.

207 Taissier Khalaf, *nash'at al masrah fi biladisham 1847-1917* (the birth of theater in the Levant 1847–1917), Sharjah 2018.

208 M. M. Badawi, *Early Arabic Drama*, Cambridge 1988, 57.

209 Cf. Khalaf, 2018, 7.

210 See: Matti Moosa, “Naqqāsh and the Rise of the Native Arab Theatre in Syria”, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 3, 1972, 106–117.

211 See: Badawi, 1988, 43–44.

212 Cf. Khalaf, 2018, 10.

213 See: Ismail, 2017, 23.

214 Less than a year. See: Ismail, 2017, 134.

then become decadent with their colloquial language and poor content.²¹⁵ Al-Qabbani's theater presented its audience with technical and aesthetic novelty which manifested in well written plots, refined poetry, music, dancing and singing, as well as sophisticated social and cultural content²¹⁶ that people could understand and relate to. In Egypt, Al-Qabbani staged with his troupe for 16 years (1884–1900), and that is the longest period a theater troupe was continuously active in the Arabic world.²¹⁷ Arabist and cultural scholar Regina Karachouli notes that Al-Qabbani's attempt to bring theater to the Damascene masses of the 19th century, a time of cultural slumber and religious dominance, made him “ein bleibendes menschliches und künstlerisches Vorbild”.²¹⁸ The pioneer's biography and output were extensively studied²¹⁹ and revived by prominent Syrian playwright and theater scholar Sadallah Wannous (1941–1997),²²⁰ whose work focuses on the thorny relationship between individuals and authorities.²²¹ Wannous created and staged edited scenes of Al-Qabbani's plays in the 1970s, where he tried to illuminate the work conditions and the social-political context in which Al-Qabbani lived and struggled to establish his theater, and the various ways in which his story can be linked to the present.²²²

The fact that Al-Qabbani turned down European theater forms and foreign adaptations in favor of classical Arabic literature is especially meaningful for Wannous, who saw an overabundance in adapted scripts at his time, coupled with a lack of productions based on Arabic scripts. Consequently, Wannous's strategy was to revive native theatrical forms, as will be illustrated in a later chapter. Overall, one may conclude that Al-Qabbani's work preserved and promoted a traditional form of Arabic theatricality, which made its way not only to future stages, but also to cinema and television.²²³

215 See: Khalaf, 2018, 12ff.

216 Cf. Ismail, 2017, 29, 134f.

217 Ibid.

218 Karachouli, 1992, 95.

219 Cf. f.n. 34.

220 See: Katarína Bešková, “Sa'dallāh Wannūs and the theatre of politicization”, *Asian and African Studies* 24/2, 2015, 211–232.

221 Cf. Bešková, 2015, 211ff.

222 Sadallah Wannous, *Sahra ma Abi Halil al-Qabbani* (An evening with Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani), Damascus 1973. This production of the Syrian National Theater was shown in 1975 in Berlin, directed by Asaad Fidda. Cf. Karachouli, 1992, f.n. 42.

223 Karachouli writes: “Mit diesem Genre wurde nicht zuletzt eine Traditionslinie bewahrt und gefordert, die auf der Bühne, später auch in Rundfunk und Film, so berühmte Namen wie Dawud Husni, Sayyid Darwish, Umm Kultum, Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab, Farid al-Atrash und viele andere aufzuweisen hat”. Karachouli, 1992, 97.

4. Oriental Muses and Their Rebellious Offspring

Among the artists in Al-Qabbani's troupe were several Muslim men, such as actor Omar Wasfi and singer Abdo El-Hamouli. Female artists, on the other hand, were mostly from Arabic Jewish and Christian families.²²⁴ Among others were actresses/dancers Rosa and Esthera (Tirah) Al-Hakim,²²⁵ diva and Qanun player Malikeh Sourour and sisters Mariam, Hilana and Henainah Summat,²²⁶ to whom the troupe owes a great deal of its success.²²⁷ Rosa (Abla) is the lead of the previously mentioned play *Antar bin Shaddad*,²²⁸ which was staged in Chicago in 1893.²²⁹ *The Galveston Daily* describes her as a performer "of the best type, being actress, singer, reciter and dancer", but it is the correspondent's depiction of Esthera (Tirah) Al-Hakim's performance that is most remarkable:

"I never saw any other dance like this of Tirah's. It was a Byronic poem more forceful than words. Without a particle of expression in her handsome brown face or slumberous dark eyes, she wined and repulsed, won and wore the lover whose story she was telling à la Delsarte. Morris cannot shiver, Bernhardt cannot shrug her shoulders, Harriet Russell cannot roll her lips, Davenport cannot embrace the empty air, and the ever lass fairy Lillien Russell cannot impart the soft suggestions to chin and neck, which are the birthright of Tirah, and she can do more. Whether she has a legion of tiny birds concealed in her bosom, or it is only her heart which moves about at will, I cannot say".²³⁰

The journalist's passion for Tirah's talent is overtly stated. This, however, does not seem to affect his ability to make very specific observations about several prominent artists and public

224 Cf. Karachouli, 1992, 84.

225 Other Arabic Jewish stage and early cinema actresses include Milia Dian, Adele Levi, Saliha and Gracia Qasin, Esther Shattah, Nazla Mizrahi, Serena and Negma Ibrahim, Victoria, Samha and Henriette Cohen (Bahiga El Mahdy), Victoria Mousa, Rachel Abraham (Raquyah Ibrahim), Lilian Victor Levi Cohen (Camelia) and the most prominent Leila Mourad. See: Amr Dowara, "Mariam Summat, Milia Dian's fierce rival", *Masrahuna* (weekly cultural magazine of the Egyptian General Organization of Culture Palaces), Vol. 651, February, 2020, <https://www.gocp.gov.eg/masr7na/articles.aspx?ArticleID=22818>, 16.11.2022. Jewish male artists are easier to trace in Egyptian cinema than theater, most prominently director Joseph Elie (Togo) Mizrahi, Clément and Camilio Mizrahi and actor Leon (Chalom) Angel (of Italian and Greek origin, cf. f.n. 53). See: Deborah A. Starr, "Coexistence in Togo Mizrahi's Alexandria Films" in: Rebecca Bryant (Ed.), *Post-Ottoman Coexistence, Sharing Space in the Shadow of Conflict*, New York 2016, 129-156; "Chalom and 'Abdu Get Married: Jewishness and Egyptianness in the Films of Togo Mizrahi", *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 107, Nr. 2, Spring 2017, 209-230.

226 See: T. Khalaf, *sirat al ajwak al arabiya fil qarn al tase'ashar* (biography of Arabic theater troupes in the 19th century), Milan 2022; V. D. H., *The Galveston Daily News*, 1893, 6.; Ismail, 2017, 118ff.

227 Cf. Ismail, 2017, 120-121.

228 Ismail, 2017, 339-370.

229 See the scene description on page 26.

230 V. D. H., *The Galveston Daily News*, 1893, 6. Morris: American actress Clara Morris (1846-1925). Bernhardt: French stage actress Sara Bernhardt (1844-1923). Harriet Russell: Probably a reference to Harriet Williams Russell Strong (1844-1926), American social activist and leading figure of the early woman's movement. Davenport: Harold George Bryant Davenport (1866-1949), prominent American film and stage actor. Lillien Russell: (1860 or 1861-1922), one of the most prominent American actresses and singers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

figures of the time, referencing some of their most well-known gestures and comparing them with those of Tirah's.

Years after the Chicago trip, Al-Qabbani's troupe was still performing in Egypt, featuring more female performers than ever before. In 1897, Al-Qabbani formed a choir lead by Syrian diva Malikeh Sourour, who would perform in the plays, between the acts or in the finale.²³¹ This new musical form was so successful that the troupe was invited by the Egyptian government to perform in Ezbekiyya Gardens, which was previously dominated by foreign troupes.²³² Another female pioneer who starred on Al-Qabbani's stage is Mariam (Mary) Summat. Together with her sisters Hilana and Hunaina, Summat belongs to the first generation of Levantine theater artists who worked in Egypt, and started to become visible during the last quarter of the 19th and the first quarter of the 20th century. With the very first being Labiba Manelli, who was trained and brought to Egypt by Al-Qabbani, then moved on to star in many stagings by other troupes such as the Soliman Cardahi and the Iskandar Farah troupes.²³³ Manelli was followed by Milia Dian, sisters Ibriz and Almaz Astaty and Badia Massabni, who fled Ottoman Syria to live and work in Egypt.²³⁴

Beside her pioneering role as stage actress in several prominent troupes, Mariam Summat was the first Arabic woman to document her life and career in theater. Under the title "al tamthil al arabi" (Arabic acting), her memoirs were published in Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram* in 1915, in a series of articles²³⁵ shedding light on important aspects of an almost lost part of the history of Arabic theater.²³⁶ Since then, these memoirs were only published in Arabic in 2013, and recently in 2022.²³⁷ In her unique records, Summat tells the story of joining Al-Qabbani's troupe in Cairo in 1890, where women were mostly played by androgynous Damascene men, as stage actresses were quite rare.²³⁸ Summat speaks with great anger about defamation campaigns of female performers, and the way theater was viewed by conservatives as a house

231 Ismail, 2017, 118.

232 Cf. Ismail, 2017, 119.

233 Hamadi Ben Halima, *Ein halbes Jahrhundert arabisches Theater in Tunesien (1907-1957)*, Tunisia 1974. 39ff.

234 See: Fayrouz Karawya, "awalem am mutribat?" (Divas or Courtesans?), Mada Masr, 2022, <https://mada33.appspot.com/www.madamasr.com/ar/2022/11/26/feature/%D8%AB%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A9/%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A3%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%9F/?fbclid=IwAR3rKCeREvSO-Ih071rq0wd41Bfg3X55RCfFX9KjrrIkCknr-wQ1ReA5c84>, 02. 12. 2022.

235 In five parts between July and September, 1915.

236 Cf. Dawara, *Masrahuna*, Vol. 651, 2020.

237 See: Fouad Rashid, *tariikh al masrah al arabi* (history of Arabic theater), Cairo 2013; Taisier Khalaf, Milan 2022.

238 Cf. Khalaf, 2022, 5f.

of vice, immorality, and prostitution, asserting that theater is a place for refined entertainment and artistic and cultural renaissance, that should not be confused with downtown brothels and cheap taverns whose sole purpose is to entertain travelers and men of trade.²³⁹

The influence of Syrian Jewish and Christian pioneer-actresses was strong enough to usher in the first Muslim women on the stage, most prominently Egyptian singer and actress Zakiya Hasan Mansour, known as Munira El Mahdeya (1884–1965).²⁴⁰ El Mahdeya started her performance career by joining the troupe of singer and musical theater pioneer Salama Higazi (1852–1917).²⁴¹ Disguised as a man, she replaced Higazi on stage during his last illness.²⁴² In 1915 El Mahdeya formed her own theater company,²⁴³ producing Arabic adaptations of European operas and plays and collaborating with some of the most prominent talents of her time, such as composers Dawud Husni, Sayed Darwish, and Muhammad Al-Qasabji.²⁴⁴ Her work featured songs with national and political content which was continuously censored by British colonial authorities in Egypt.²⁴⁵ Other songs by El Mahdeya were unique in their recognition of a more open and free sexuality, which became a hallmark of her performance style and lyrical choices.²⁴⁶ El Mahdeya opened the door for many female performers, whom she sometimes helped introducing through her troupe and the “nuzhat al nufous” (souls’ picnic) cabaret that she owned.²⁴⁷ And while Summat’s name was present in the media for about 25 years after she started working in theater in 1890,²⁴⁸ El Mahdeya’s career span no less than 45 years.²⁴⁹

Another prominent female artist and show-business woman, who helped a large number of artists take their first steps in the world of professional performance, was the Syrian/Lebanese

239 Cf. Raphael Cormack, *Midnight in Cairo, The Divas of Egypt’s Roaring ’20s*, 2021, 13ff.

240 See: “Munira al-Mahdiyya (Zakiyya Husayn Mansur) 1884–1965”, Foundation for Arab Music Archiving & Research (AMAR), <https://www.amar-foundation.org/munira-al-mahdiyya/>, 02. 12. 2022.

241 Mounira El Mahdeya in interview with Amani Nashed, 1963, Maspero Zaman, Youtube, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIcnHiOuW1I&ab_channel=MasperoZaman-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86, 04. 02. 2022.

242 See: “Munira al-Mahdiyya (1884–1965)”, Foundation for Arab Music Archiving & Research (AMAR).

243 Cormack, *Apollo*, 2020.

244 Cf. Fairouz Karawya, *Mada Masr*, 2022.

245 See: Ismail, *masirat al masrah fi misr 1900-1935* (History of Theater in Egypt 1900-1935), Cairo 2003; Windsor 2018, 339, 343f; “Munira al-Mahdiyya (1884–1965)”, AMAR Foundation.

246 In “baad el esha” (After Sunset), track four on her first music album, El Mahdeya addresses a lover saying: “I’ll expect you on Tuesday/ Tuesday, late in the evening/ You’ll find all things ready/ Electricity in my hands/ There’ll be nobody there but us/ and no cause to be shy”. See: Amuna Wagner, “Nozhet El Nofous (Those Who Were Not Invited)”, PAM – Pan African Music online music magazine, 2022, <https://pan-african-music.com/en/nozhet-el-nofous-nancy-mounir/>, 07. 12. 2022.

247 Ibid.

248 See: Dawara, *Masrahuna*, Vol. 651, 2020.

249 Cf. Mounira El Mahdeya in interview, 1963, Youtube, 2016.

Badia Masabni (1892–1974).²⁵⁰ Joining stage pioneers Mariam Summat, Nazla Mizrahi and Esther Shattah, Masabni started her career on stage in 1912 in the troupe of the Lebanese/Egyptian actor George Abyad,²⁵¹ then moved to join the troupe of Ahmad Al-Shami, a former member of Iskandar Farah's²⁵² troupe who formed his own in 1908 and toured Egypt till 1930.²⁵³ Masabni's activity was not limited to Egypt, as she also toured and performed in the Levant, where she met film and stage actor Naguib El-Rihani²⁵⁴ in 1922. Together with El-Rihani, Badia Masabni acted and staged several popular plays, some of which were directly inspired by Al-Qabbani's scripts.²⁵⁵ In 1926 she opened her first cabaret and a small entertainment hall,²⁵⁶ at a time when "downtown Cairo was thick with theatres, cabarets, dancehalls, and cinemas, and had an entertainment scene to rival other global cities – Berlin, Paris, or New York".²⁵⁷

Business flourished and Masabni opened her famous Casino Badia in Place de l'Opéra in 1929, "which turned into one of Cairo's main venues for social and cultural events between World War I and World War II".²⁵⁸ There, the artist/entrepreneur staged many performances, employing and introducing a large number of musicians, singers and stage actors and actresses.²⁵⁹ With a strategic location in the center of Cairo, Masabni's new venture was embraced by the Egyptian capital, a thriving Arab/European cultural hub at the time, and Casino Badia "blended perfectly with this prevailing multiculturalism, which was avant-garde, festive and exclusive".²⁶⁰

250 Cf. "Madame Badia's Casino" in: Cormack, London 2021, 245–272, 245; Karin van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade Like Any Other: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt*, Texas 1995.

251 Badia Masabni in interview with Laila Rustom, 1966, Hani Jordan's video archive, Youtube, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DiDVScUkPHk&ab_channel=haniJordan%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9, 13. 12. 2022.

252 An actor in Al-Qabbani's troupe who eventually formed his own troupe and became Al-Qabbani's main rival. See: Ismail, 2017, 89f.

253 Cf. Ismail, 2003, 441ff.

254 Whom Edward Said refers to as "a formidable combination of Chaplin and Molière". Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Cambridge 2000, 334.

255 Most prominently *al layali al milah* (The Beautiful Nights) in 1929.

256 Ismail, 2003, 442.

257 Cormack, *Apollo*, 2020.

258 Stéphanie Khouri writes: "The rapid success of Casino Badia is actually based on a business model that leaves nothing to chance. Masabni is certainly an artist, but the young woman had a head for business and a particularly developed innovative spirit." Stéphanie Khouri in conversation with Mariem Guellouz (a dancer, researcher and lecturer at the Université Paris-Cité), "Badia Masabni, the fallen queen of belly dancing", *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 2022, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1309028/badia-masabni-the-fallen-queen-of-belly-dancing.html>, 05. 12. 2022.

259 Ismail, 2003, 467.

260 Khouri, *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 2022.

Dubbed as “dean of belly dancing” and the “mistress of theater”, Masabni’s story and career embodies “the magnetism of Arab capitals, the hubs of the region’s cultural movement in the first part of the 20th century, the advent of cinema, and the air of freedom, which authoritarian regimes in the region were quick to sweep away.”²⁶¹ And while Al-Qabbani’s theater brought the first Arab female performers to the world, Masabni’s entertainment hall was alma mater to most of the Levantine and Egyptian artists who came to prominence some years later.²⁶²

Badia Masabni’s legacy is infused in the generations of women-performers she trained and helped introducing. The movements she taught were free and unusual, with choreography featuring a mix of different genres and plenty of new instruments. “Jewelry, rhinestones, transparent veils and nude outfits were part of the show”, and the female body was “turned into an instrument and source of creation capable of reinventing itself with each and every performance”.²⁶³ Badia Masabni’s career as an actress, dancer and “trainer of young talent”,²⁶⁴ ended few years after the Second World War, and her “true heir and disciple was Tahia Carioca”,²⁶⁵ the actress and dancer described by Edward Said as a “political militant” and a “remarkable symbol of a national culture”.²⁶⁶

According to several Arabic and foreign accounts,²⁶⁷ Tahia Mohammed Kraiem know as Tahiya Carioca (1915–1919)²⁶⁸ was an extraordinary performer with a strong, shrewd character, who had a special role in the social and cultural scene in Egypt during the first half of the 19th century, as Said maintains in his essay about her:

“Tahia belongs, not to the easily identified culture of B-girls and fallen women, but to the world of progressive women skirting or unblocking the social lanes. She remained organically linked, however, to her country’s society, because she discovered another, far more interesting role for herself as dancer and entertainer. This was the all-but-forgotten role of *almeh* (literally, a learned woman), spoken of by nineteenth-century European visitors to the Orient such as Edward Lane and Flaubert. The *almeh* was a courtesan of sorts, but a woman of significant accomplishments. Dancing was only one of her gifts:

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Among others Mohammed Abdel Wahab (prominent 20th-century singer, actor, and composer), actress and superstar Leila Murad and belly dancer/actress Tahiya Carioca. See: Ismail, 2003, 440; Khouri, *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 2022.

²⁶³ Khouri, *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 2022.

²⁶⁴ Edward Said “Homage to a Belly-Dancer: On Tahia Carioca” in: *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Cambridge 2000, 331–339, 331.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Barbara Sellers-Young, *Belly Dance, Pilgrimage and Identity*, London 2016, 21ff; Tarek El Shennawi, *zaman taheyya kariokka* (The Times of Tahiya Carioca), Cairo 2017; “Farewell to Egypt’s Queen of Dance”, BBC NEWS, Middle East, 1999, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/454010.stm, 07. 12. 2022; Douglas Martin, “Tahia Carioca, 79, Dies”, *The New York Times*, 1999. <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/09/22/arts/tahia-carioca-79-dies-a-renowned-belly-dancer.html>, 07. 12. 2022.

²⁶⁸ Cf. Barbara Sellers-Young, 2016, 21.

others were the ability to sing and recite classical poetry, to discourse wittily, to be sought after for her company by men of law, politics, and literature”.²⁶⁹

Historically, an almah or almeh (plural: awalem) were female artists whose activity took place outside the conventional parameters and the domestic social role of Arabic women. Fairouz Karawya, Egyptian artists and scholar at the Sorbonne University, writes that during the times of Masabni and Carioca, the term was used to refer to multi-talented, professional women who manage their own business: Women with the audacity to perform and lead the accompanying choir among various public and private, social and political settings.²⁷⁰

Tahiya Carioca's career was highly intertwined with multifaceted political activity, extraordinary episodes and strong relationships with Egyptian heads of state, from King Farouk to president Mubarak.²⁷¹ Long before she came to prominence, Carioca became familiar with political activism through her family. Her uncle was executed and her father imprisoned by British colonists.²⁷² Consequently, the young Carioca had a strong anti-colonial attitude and sought a role in the resistance movement. After being charged as complicit in the assassination of finance minister Amin Osman, which was allegedly motivated by his pro-British stance,²⁷³ Anwar Sadat (an army officer at the time, president of Egypt later) fled Cairo and took refuge in the countryside at Carioca's family estate in Ismailia.²⁷⁴

Beside her participation in the resistance against the British, Carioca was known for her left orientation, which led her to join communist organization “The Democratic Movement for National Liberation” (HADITU)²⁷⁵ in the 1950s, that was headed by Henri Curiel.²⁷⁶ Carioca was then detained together with her husband Mostafa Kamal Sidqy, commander of the Egyptian Iron Guard before the July Revolution, for an attempt to overthrow the regime in 1954.²⁷⁷ Through different periods of her life and long carrier on stage and in the cinema, Carioca “emerged as as one of the leaders of a very vocal and politically advanced syndicate

269 Said, 2000, 334.

270 Cf. Karawya, Mada Masr, 2022.

271 “Farewell to Egypt's Queen of Dance”, BBC NEWS, 1999; El Shennawi, 2017.

272 See: Said, 2000, 337.

273 Barry James, “Sadat killing seen to fit pattern: Random and isolated”, United Press International, 1981, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1981/10/10/Sadat-killing-seen-to-fit-pattern-Random-and-isolated/7155371534400/>, 13. 12. 2022.

274 El Shennawi, 2017, 10f.

275 Cf. El Shennawi, 2017, 12; Said 336.

276 See: Joel Beinin; Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: nationalism, communism, Islam, and the Egyptian working class, 1882–1954*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1998, 452.

277 Ashraf Gharib, “Remembering Tahia Karioka: A little bit of belly-dancing and a whole lot of acting”, Ahram online, 2017, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/32/278122/Arts—Culture/Film/Remembering-Tahia-Karioka-A-little-bit-of-bellydan.aspx>, 13. 12. 2022; cf. Said 337.

of cinema actors, directors, and photographers”,²⁷⁸ demanding better working conditions and social security for artists in Egypt.

Tahiya Carioca’s engagement in political theater started at a later period in her life, and is poorly documented despite the popularity of her plays and their great influence on later generations. This chapter began with the forming of Carioca’s troupe with playwright and director Fayez Halawa in 1963, with whom she continued to work until the late 1970s.²⁷⁹ Inspired by the tales of Badia Masabni’s theatrical tours in various cities and countryside regions, Carioca’s troupe toured Egypt from the Nile Delta in the north to the remote villages of Upper Egypt in the south, some of which have not witnessed any theatrical activity since the Masabni days.²⁸⁰ Some of the Halawa/Carioca plays criticized corruption and bureaucracy such as *al baghl fil ibriq* (The Mule in the Kettle) 1967,²⁸¹ others commented on the political scene as did the highly acclaimed *yahya al wafd* (Long live the delegation) 1972.²⁸² The play recounts facts and anecdotes related to the visit of a Soviet delegation to a small Egyptian village, with scenes of peasants being instructed and coached on how to receive the important visitors, chants of “long live the delegation” and many comic paradoxes presented with high doses of sarcasm.²⁸³

While working on stage in the 1960s and the 1970s, Carioca faced constant interference and censorship by the Egyptian government, for instance over the play *Kaddabin el zaffa* (The Wedding Liars), which was supposed to be staged in 1960. By highlighting the practices of certain societal layers²⁸⁴ that surround government officials and those in power,²⁸⁵ the play seeks to address the twisted and despicable aspects and methods of social/political hypocrisy and opportunism in Egyptian society. The play text was censored by the government, which

278 Said, 2000, 336.

279 Said, 2000, 337.

280 A. Shaaban, “Political cabaret, from Fayez Halawa to Ahmad Beder”, *Rose al-Yousef*. Arabic weekly political magazine, 2020, available at:

<https://goldenbook.rosaelyoussef.com/5035/%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%85-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B9>, 13. 12. 2022.

281 The play texts have not been published but some of them were video recorded and are made available on the Egyptian Radio and Television Union channel (Maspero) on Youtube, such as *al baghl fil ibriq* (The Mule in the Kettle) 1967, Maspero Zaman, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-V4ZKTfisc>, 14. 12. 2022.

282 This play, a problematic one at the time, is not available in script or video, but was covered in the press, which is what I’m relying on as a source.

283 Cf. Said, 2000, 337. Said hated the play as he was deeply dismayed with its political content, but he also seems to be missing many important details about it, including the name of its author/director Fayez Halawa, which Said misspells as “Fayek Halawa”.

284 Labeled by the author as “election opportunists” and “cheer professionals”.

285 A. Shaaban, *Rose al-Yousef*, 2020.

sparked a crisis that censorship authorities sought to alleviate temporarily by forming a committee to read the text and then reject it once more, until major changes were made to the script and the play was finally staged in 1972.²⁸⁶ Halawa and Carioca's comic treatment and heavy use of social criticism and political satire was the most important characteristic of their theatrical endeavor, paving the way for different forms of political cabaret in Egypt, which continued for decades after they were gone.

Apart from the social and political stage (and especially as a dancer), Carioca had a unique understanding of her main occupation. Edward Said maintains that she "saw herself—correctly, I believe—as part of a major cultural renaissance, a nationalist revival in the arts based on the liberal independence movement of Saad Zaghloul and his revolution of 1919".²⁸⁷ When asked by Said in 1975, Carioca described the way she felt about dancing "like being in a temple".²⁸⁸ It is a mode of being in which she evolved from a poor, suppressed countryside girl to "the other woman, a counter to the virtuous, domestically acceptable, and much less interesting female lead" on stage and in the cinema, where she was repeatedly portrayed as "a dangerous woman—the almeh who is too learned, too smart, too sexually advanced for any man in contemporary Egypt".²⁸⁹

Carioca's rebellious spirit was best represented and promoted through her mastery of vaguely erotic belly dance, a form of self expression in which she became "an emblem of all that was unadministered, uncontrolled, uncoopted in her culture".²⁹⁰ Barbara Sellers-Young is a Senior Scholar and Professor Emerita in the Dance Department of York University. In a paper co-authored with dancer, dance scholar and anthropologist Anthony Shay, Sellers-Young notes that "[t]hroughout the twentieth century major film stars Theda Bara, Dolores Gray, Hedy Lamarr, and Rita Hayworth performed Broadway and Hollywood versions of this dance in biblical sagas, 'Arabian Nights' films, and 'Kismet' musicals from the earliest periods of the film industry", which played a major role in portraying Middle Eastern women through exotic dance. Later on, the dance was promoted and popularized by certain social and political groups within the context of counter-culture, where "twin movements of feminism and sexual liberation that many women felt were manifest in this genre, spurred the revival of interest in belly dance in the 1970s".²⁹¹

286 Cf. Ibid.

287 Said, 2000, 337.

288 Ibid.

289 Said, 2000, 335.

290 Said, 2000, 338.

291 Anthony Shay; Barbara Sellers-Young, "Belly Dance: Orientalism: Exoticism: Self-Exoticism" in: *Dance*

Sheila Bock, associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Nevada, and Katherine Borland, associate professor of humanities at The Ohio State University examine the practice of belly dancing by white women in Central Ohio, noting that “the ‘otherness’ of belly dance has become a resource for these women as they describe the emergent meanings of the dance for them as individuals.”²⁹²

Bock and Borland also maintain that “[t]he dance’s value stems in large part from its cultural difference. However, its subversive force comes from a process by which dance movements become naturalized within the body.”²⁹³ This observation is highly reminiscent of Carioca’s view of the act of dancing.²⁹⁴ In this context, oriental belly dance is seen and used as a vehicle to liberate the dancer, where “[w]estern women’s projections onto Middle Eastern women of an autonomous and powerful sexuality reflect their desire to contest what they see as a denial of the female body in their own culture”.²⁹⁵ Bock and Borland’s are thereby drawing a direct link between the art of Tahiya Carioca and modern western women “[a]lligning themselves with the perceived unselfconscious excesses associated with Middle Eastern dancers”, in order to “distance themselves from Western ideals of self-restraint”.²⁹⁶ And while the fascination with and the practice of belly dance in the west can be traced back to early cinema, today there is an incredibly large and diverse, transnational female community devoted to the belly dance culture and its many functions, Sellers-Young explains:

“Since the 1970s, when this dance began to reach hundreds of thousands of American women, teachers, primarily women, have taught students the solo dance forms of Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Persia, Uzbekistan, and Saudi Arabia and developed new variant hybrids with names such as ‘American tribal,’ ‘spiritual,’ and ‘cabaret.’ They have also, via international festivals, spread the dance to Europe, South America, Australia, and Asia. This large, eclectic, and primarily female community maintains daily communication via a seven-hundred member e-mail list serve, proffers itself to the cyber world on more than three hundred Web pages, and shares moving images of the styles or hybrid forms of the dance through video. Thus, the divergent forms-ethnic and hybrid-have become part of global performance culture staged in restaurants, Renaissance fairs, concert stages, and international festivals”.²⁹⁷

The continuously evolving forms of belly dance and its almost incredible longevity are strong indications of its high functionality. This, perhaps, is the strongest vindication of Tahiya Carioca and her predecessors²⁹⁸ of Arabic stage artists, who challenged the social and political

Research Journal, Vol. 35, No. 1, Summer, 2003, 13–37, 17.

292 Sheila Bock; Katherine Borland, “Exotic Identities: Dance, Difference, and Self-fashioning”, in: *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 48, No. 1, January/April, 2011, 1–36, 12.

293 Ibid.

294 Cf. f.n. 152.

295 Bock; Borland, 2011, 12.

296 Ibid.

297 Shay; Sellers-Young, 2003, 17.

298 See the memoirs of Miriam Summat, page 31.

setting of their day and stepped into the field of professional performance with strong determination and a very clear vision.

5. The Sociopolitical and the Politicized 1960–1980

The 1960s and the 1970s was an important period for the development of Arabic culture and theater in particular. Pannewick writes that “[f]ür das arabische Theater der sechziger und siebziger Jahre war es zunächst von grundlegender Bedeutung, einen eigenen Weg zu suchen und zu klären, wohin genau er führen soll”.²⁹⁹ One starting point was to observe the fundamental differences between Greek/European and Arabic drama, especially regarding the concept of tragedy and figure of the tragic hero, that is, a victim of fate in the former, and of his own choices in the latter, as Egyptian playwright and novelist Yusuf Idris explains:

“Die Tragödie ist dort ausschließlich metaphysisch und die Tragödie hier ist ausschließlich gesellschaftlich, die Tragödie ist dort der Kampf in der Beziehung zwischen dem Menschen und seinem Schöpfer oder Herrscher über sein Schicksal, doch hier ist Tragödie der Kampf in der Beziehung zwischen dem Menschen und seinem Bruder, dem Mitmenschen, und bedeutet ein Verbrechen des Menschen gegen seinen Mitmenschen und nicht ein Verbrechen des Schicksals am Menschen”.³⁰⁰

Since Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani, Arabic theater has attempted to find “organic links”³⁰¹ between the past and present, which should enable viewers to consider contemporary social and political reality through comparison with past events, thereby allowing them to question the present by contemplating history and analyzing its codes. Another prominent characteristic that has long been dominant in Arabic theatricality is the strong desire for experimentation. Pannewick observes that “ein Blick auf frühe Entwicklungen in Japan oder China zeigt erstaunliche Parallelen zum frühen arabischen Theater in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts”.³⁰² The Levantine theater of the 1960s and the 1970s saw both, established and free troupes competing to present the new and the astonishing on the stage, with works inspired by various foreign forms, from the traditional Noh in Japan, through Brechtian epic, to the French théâtre de l'absurde.

In Syria, Al-Qabbani theater house was established during this period. Eventually, this house became devoted to what has come to be known as the “experimental theater” endeavor under

299 Pannewick, 2000, 176.

300 Yusuf Idris, *A-Farafir*, Cairo 1964, 47, quoted after Pannewick, 2000, 112.

301 Hussein Hamwi, *al itijah al qawmi fi masrah adnan mardam al shi'ri* (National Tendencies in Adnān Mardam's Verse Play), Damascus 1999, 268.

302 Pannewick, 2000, 175.

the management of playwright Saadallah Wannous.³⁰³ Wannous's project sought the origins of Arabic theatricality in traditional sources and attempted to contextualize the sociopolitical present in connection with the past.³⁰⁴

Moreover, this period saw Arabic poetry in its various forms and many schools storming the walls of theater and climbing the stage, using a collective memory that is very affectionate about sound and metaphor. This linguistic, often romantic capacity was most obvious in works of theatrical verse studded with prose, such as plays by Muhammad Al-Maghout, Mamduh Adwan and Farhan Bulbul. Plays from that period often represented the national trend in Syrian literature, however, with very different – sometimes even contrasted – accents, intellectual tendencies and poetic styles, as Syrian literary scholar and critic Ghassan Ghunaim observes: “Some would base their views on moderate traditional Islamic concepts, others turned to Western rationalism. One group would search for solutions in existential philosophy, while many resorted to socialist realism [Trans. Y. A]”.³⁰⁵

Another theatrical endeavor which enjoyed great popularity among audiences and critics alike is that of Al-Rahbani family in Lebanon. Al-Rahbani plays rely strongly on poetry and music, featuring a diva whose presence and performance are central to the performances. They can be seen as an attempt to create a popular, non commercial musical theater — a genre that is highly reminiscent of the work of Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani. In its second generation, Al-Rahbani theater was carried on by author, director and musician Ziad Al-Rahbani, albeit with very different devices. Relying heavily on text, word play and social/political satire, Ziad's theater of the 1970s and the 1980s attained an exceptionally high level of popularity among Lebanese youth, as will be illustrated.

Whether experimental, traditional or musical, Arabic theater thrived at “fulfilling an important cultural function” during the 1960s and 1970s, Roger Allen explains, “[b]y daring to raise issues of political and social importance in a public forum and by testing the limits of the local and the pan-Arabic worlds through experiments with language, it showed signs of illustrating many of the larger areas of concern within the Arabic-speaking countries”.³⁰⁶ Given their

303 See: Hamwi, Damascus 1999, 363.

304 Most prominently *al fil ya malik azzaman* (The Elephant, Oh, King of Ages) 1969, *mughamarat ra's al mamluk jabir* (The Adventure of Mamlūk Jābir's Head) 1971, *sahra ma abi khalil al-qabbani* (An evening with Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani), 1973 and *al malik huwa al malik* (The King's the King) 1977. See: Saadallah Wannous, *al a'mal al kamila* (The Complete Works), Damascus 1996.

305 Ghassan Ghunaim, *al-masrah alsiyasi fi suriya* (Political Theater in Syria), Damascus 1996, 83.

306 Allen, “Arabic Drama”, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Arabic-literature/Drama>, 15. 1. 2023.

strong impact across different social classes, one may argue that figures like Wannous, Al-Maghout and Ziad Al-Rahbani were largely responsible for establishing a culture of social/political critique, which, given a couple of decades,³⁰⁷ has gradually evolved into an explosive movement of protest among the Arabic youth.

5.1 Saadallah Wannous: Experimental theater, traditional threads

Despite the great importance of Wannous's theatrical endeavor, "scholarship on him has been somewhat uneven, tending to treat him in isolation from the wider cultural currents in which he participated".³⁰⁸ Yet eventually, Wannous became the most well-studied Syrian dramatist of his time, both in and outside the Arab world.³⁰⁹ This calls for a careful approach when writing about him today, in order to avoid redundancy and over-interpretation of his work and the literature in which he outlined his projects, while focusing on the important elements that form his theater theory. For the purpose of this research I will try to highlight what I consider relevant for contemporary Arabic theater, particularly in German-speaking exile. This includes Wannous's commitment to identifying his audience as key element in the theatrical process, his theater of politicization, and ability to connect to the Arabic theater tradition: "a continuum of which he considers himself a very real part",³¹⁰ as his manifestos and extensive stage directions show. An idealist with a strong Marxist conviction, Wannous was heavily influenced by the May 1968 movement in France, which he had the opportunity to observe closely while attending the Theatre of Nations in Paris.³¹¹ For the Arabic stage and its audience, Wannous aspired to create a theater which does not only handle political content,

307 In which the region was continuously destabilized by foreign interference as well as unprecedented levels of corruption. Cf. Leslie Tramontini; Stephan Milich, "Writing against Injustice and Oppression. On the Literary Commitment of Muḏaffar al-Nawwāb and Muḥammad al-Māghūt", *Al-Abhath* 62–63 (2014–2015), 103–133, 104.

308 Faisal Adel Hamadah, "Travelling Theatre: Saadallah Wannous's Journeys between the Local and the International", *Theatre Research International* 43, no. 3, 2018, 305–17, 305.

309 Beside several translations of his plays, academic literature about Wannous includes: Roger Allen, "Arabic Theatre in Theory and Practice: The Writings of Sa'dallāh Wannūs", *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 15, 1984, 49–113; Abdulaziz H. Abdulla, "Western influences on the theatre of the Syrian playwright Sa'd Allāh Wannūs", Dissertation, University of Manchester, Department of Middle Eastern Studies 1993; A. Al-Anezi, "An Analytical Study of the Theatre of the Syrian Playwright Saadallah Wannous, with Particular Emphasis on the Plays Written After the 1967 War". Dissertation, The University of Sheffield, Department of English Literature 2006; Marvin Carlson, "Negotiating Theatrical Modernism in the Arab World", *Theatre Journal*, 65, 2013, 523–35; Edward Ziter, *Political Performance in Syria*, Basingstoke 2015; Katarína Bešková, "Sa'dallāh Wannūs and the theatre of politicization", *Asian and African Studies* 24/2, 2015. Wannous also received in depth analysis by Friederike Pannewick in German: Pannewick, *Das Wagnis Tradition: Arabische Wege der Theatralität, Literaturen im Kontext*; 2. Wiesbaden 2000, and in English: Pannewick, "Historical Memory in Times of Decline: Saadallah Wannous and Rereading History" in: Angelika Neuwirth; Andreas Pflitsch; Barbara Winckler (Eds.), *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives*, London: 2010, 97–109.

310 Shawkat M. Toorawa, "A translation of Sahrah m'a Abi Khalil al-Qabbani by Sa'dallāh Wannūs", *Arabic & Middle Eastern Literature*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2000, 19–49, 19.

but also works to politicize, that is, to motivate its viewers to think about the Arabic and Syrian political plight. In an attempt to realize this vision, Wannous layed out a plan for Arabic theater makers to be first published in Damascus in 1970: *The Manifestos for a New Arab Theater*.³¹² As an “antithesis of having them marginalized by political leaderships”,³¹³ Wannous sought to involve the audience in the artistic process as “co-creators of the theatrical effect”.³¹⁴ But in order for that to happen, a most fundamental question of identifying the audience had to be tackled. Just like capitalism seeks to identify target consumers today, theater, according to Wannous, had to get well acquainted with the viewing crowd, but with the ultimate goal of empowering – instead of exploiting it:

“Identifying the audience is not a term to be consumed senselessly or a slogan showing political and intellectual hypocrisy. It is an action by which we know the real type of audience which the people who create theater aim to reach. When writers choose their audience, they also choose the problems and aspirations of that audience. They must have an opinion regarding those problems, and search for a special way to express them. They should accumulate stances that blend with each other, creating the ‘theater phenomenon’ and, eventually, its value and dynamism”.³¹⁵

Theater is inherently political

At the core of Wannous’s philosophy is his views of political theater and the theater of politicization. In the form of manifestos, he argues that however far from politics it may seem, “[t]heater started as — and remains — a political phenomenon”.³¹⁶ Even in its most non-political forms, theater is bound to fulfill a political function as it works to distract the audience from political reality and the need to protest.³¹⁷ This is not to pretend that the art form is a determining factor when it comes to social and political change, but even as a secondary contributor to that change, theater “can be an astonishing substitute in periods of repression and organized non-politicization”.³¹⁸ But in order for it to play that role theater must not entertain, rather provoke deep reflection on various life conditions by causing spectators to feel “anxious and annoyed”.³¹⁹ This “annoying” political theater was re-summoned to the Arabic stage after the Six-Day War by Wannous’s *haflat samar min ajl*

311 Alsaleh; Wannūs, “Approaching Sa’dallāh Wannūs’s Drama: The Manifestos for a New Arab Theater”, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 39, 2019, 190–227, 191.

312 Available in Saadallah Wannous, *al-a’mal al-kamila* (The Complete Works), Damascus 1996 and in English in: Alsaleh; Wannūs, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 39, 2019, 190–227.

313 Alsaleh; Wannūs, 2019, 201.

314 Alsaleh; Wannūs, 2019, 202.

315 Alsaleh; Wannūs, 2019, 210.

316 Alsaleh; Wannūs, 2019, 220.

317 Cf. Ibid.

318 Alsaleh; Wannūs, 2019, 221.

319 Ibid.

khamṣa huzayrān (Soirée for the Fifth of June) in 1967.³²⁰ The play marked the birth of Wannous's *masrah at-tasyīs* (theatre of politicization) project,³²¹ which sought to engage people in social and political discussion in an attempt to “differentiate lies they had been fed by the government and media from the self-evident truth, which was in Wannūs's eyes, the very first step to change the grim reality”.³²² In a study about Wannous's theater of politicization, Slovak orientalist Katarína Bešková summarizes the *Soirée for the Fifth of June* plot as follows:

“A play within a play, with actors mingled with the spectators in the auditorium, making comments about what is happening on the stage. According to Wannūs's instructions, the play should begin with a certain delay, inciting the anxiety among the audience, and then the director comes to the stage to apologise for the inconvenience. [...] The director gives the audience the summary of the play whose events take place during the Six Day War but some of the spectators start to protest, stating that the play fails to provide a realistic picture of the incident. In an attempt to end the debate, the director offers to the audience a traditional folkloric performance as a replacement for the play. However, the audience is not to be silenced and the director's pro-regime discourse is constantly interrupted by the testimonies of the audience. In the end, the police intervene and as a result, the playwright and some of the spectators are arrested. The play is concluded with an appeal to the audience to put into practice what they have learned from the performance”.³²³

Wannous did not live to see great social or political change in the Arab world,³²⁴ but his theatrical lessons were not without effect. The attempt to challenge propaganda, criticize the system and rebel against it became a visible tendency in Arabic and especially Syrian television drama of the following decades,³²⁵ and a sweeping movement of Arabic masses did take place as the politically charged generation of the 1980s and the 1990s came of age. This movement, nonetheless, was not equipped to deal with political vacuum, rampant corruption and the meddling of foreign powers.

The link to traditional Arabic theater-forms

In a series of articles published in the 1960s,³²⁶ Egyptian dramatist Yusuf Idris urged Arabic artists to turn away from western forms and seek inspiration in Arabic tradition. Few years

320 Saadallah Wannous, *haflat samar min ajl khamṣa huzairan* (Soirée for the Fifth of June), Beirut 1980. Also see: Abdulaziz Al-Abdullah, “The Politicisation of Arab Theatre: Sa'd Allah Wannus”, *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 10, 2013, 663–668, 663; Katarína Bešková, “Sa'dallāh Wannūs and the theatre of politicization”, *Asian and African Studies* 24/2, 2015, 211–232, 213ff.

321 Bešková, 2015, 214.

322 Ibid.

323 Bešková, 2015, 219; also see: A. Al-Anezi, “An Analytical Study of the Theatre of the Syrian Playwright Saadallah Wannous, with Particular Emphasis on the Plays Written After the 1967 War”. Dissertation, the University of Sheffield, Department of English Literature 2006. 75–117.

324 On May 15, 1997, Wannous died after a five years battle with cancer.

325 With works by authors Fouad Humera and Yam Mashadi featuring sharp social and political critique and earning much popularity.

326 See: Roger Allen, “The Artistry of Yusuf Idris”, *WLT* 55:1, 1981, 43–47, esp. 46–47.

later, his invitation was echoed by Syrian playwrights and directors Saadallah Wannous, Fawaz Al-Sajer and Walid Ikhlasī, who experimented with traditional Arabic figures and theatrical forms such as al-hakawati (the storyteller)³²⁷ and shadow play.³²⁸ In order to create an effective political theater, Wannous employed a fusion of elements from Arabic tradition and modern Brechtian techniques.³²⁹ “By resorting to history to immerse the audience in the present”,³³⁰ he aspired to create a link to Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani that would illuminate his legacy, and to invite theatergoers to contemplate his message and the conditions in which he lived and worked. In the person and work of Al-Qabbani, Wannous found a role model whose innovative work was seen as “heterodox and immoral”³³¹ by those in power, which mirrored his own, continuous struggle with the Syrian regime. In his manifestos, Wannous observes the immense difficulties, the pioneers of Arabic theater had to face, as well as “the means by which they transformed their shows into unsettling events, not relying exclusively on the text and its critique of common values and shameful conditions. Rather, they went beyond that to make the show itself an unsettling event”.³³²

Originally written in 1972, Wannous’s play *sahra ma’ abu khalil al qabbani* (An Evening with Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani)³³³ was selected by director Fawaz Al-Sajer in 1981 to be performed as a graduation event by the very first class of stage-acting students at The Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus.³³⁴ The play is meant to highlight Al-Qabbani’s “pioneering venture and his struggle as a result of having put up a theatre in Damascus”.³³⁵ In the programme sheet we read that beside its complex and multilayered structure, this play was chosen in order to help today’s students connect with traditional Arabic forms, using a text which summons a historical, theatrical instance that has not lost its actuality and relevance.³³⁶

327 For instance in *ra’s al mamluk jabir*, 1970. See: Saadallah Wannous, *mughamarat ra’s al mamluk jabir* (The Adventure of the Slave Jabir’s Head), Beirut 1989.

328 For instance in Ikhlasī’s play *The Straight Path*, 1975. See: Admer Gouryeh, “The Fictional World of Walid Ikhlasī”, *World Literature Today* 58/1, Winter 1984, 23–27; “The Sociopolitical and Cultural Ambiance of Walid Ikhlasī’s Drama”, *World Literature Today* 62/1, 1988, 50–55.

329 Alsaleh; Wannūs, 2019, 200.

330 Ibid.

331 Alsaleh; Wannūs, 2019, 196.

332 Alsaleh; Wannūs, 2019, 217.

333 See: Toorawa, 2000, 19–49; Wannous, Damascus 1996.

334 Co-founded by Wannous in 1977. Other founders include Ghassan Al-Maleh and Nabil Haffar, who studied at the University of Leipzig (the Karl Marx University between 1953 and 1991) and the former Literaturinstitut (Johannes R. Becher) and worked with Horst Schönemann, the Berliner Ensemble and Rudolf Penka. For more on this topic see: Ziad Adwan, “The place of intellectuals: The Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus between dictatorship and the market”, *Journal of Global Theatre History* 4/1, 2020, 37–54. Today, many of the institute’s graduates and former students live in exile and are active on European stage.

335 Toorawa, 2000, 19–49, 20.

336 Fawaz Al-Sajer, *sahra ma’ abu khalil al qabbani*, The Higher Institute for Dramatic Arts, programme sheet,

The text was also seen as a reference to the progressive movement al-nahda and the complex struggles and conditions it brought about, especially in the context of the problematic relationship between the east and the west.³³⁷

In Wannous's original prefatory notes on the text he describes the play as "an attempt to revive a heritage and to understand that heritage better".³³⁸ His focus on interpreting Al-Qabbani's work in terms of estrangement and participation indicates a heavy usage of the two theatrical techniques, which he believed were strongly present in the pioneer's work, as this small excerpt of the stage directions shows:

"There was, in these performances that began to jolt the tranquility of daily life, an innate 'estrangement': feelings of camaraderie emerged on those nights when the people gathered before a number of actors in order to watch them perform, to interrupt them and even to comment on their words, without any let or embarrassment... Some of the elements of this estrangement may be distinguished in the crude stage decorations that look like scenery instead of being constructed in accordance with reality, and in the acting that is performed exaggeratedly—bearing in mind at all times the fact that it is essentially 'play-acting', not metamorphosis or mimesis. These elements may also be distinguished in the songs and dances that punctuate the action and that reduce the tension in such a way that delight becomes the dominant feeling, and that distance between the spectator and the action being performed in front of him remains quite evident. [...] For my part I have tried to compose, or portray, an overview of the relationship between the spectators of that time and the actions that are occurring on stage. I have had them make comments and have incorporated these comments into the events".³³⁹

Based on his vision of the historical situation being recreated, Wannous seems to be instructing both artists and technicians on how to preserve the original scenery and atmosphere of the play within, then providing a practical example to approach that vision using the phrasing: "For my part, I have tried to [...]",³⁴⁰ which echoes the tone of the communication, perhaps also the calm, humble voice of one of Syria's most devoted theater intellectuals.

5.2 Syrian political cabaret and drama: Theater of Thorns and the October Troupe

Masrah al-Shok (Theater of Thorns) was created in 1965 by Syrian artist Omar Hajjo (1931–2015) in cooperation with actors and authors Nihad Qalei (1928–1993) and Duraid Lahham (b. 1934).³⁴¹ Hajjo started his theater career with an amateur troupe he founded in the 1950s in

Damascus, 1981, the HIDA archive, available at: https://hidaarchive.com/album/17/single_photo/642, 03. 01. 2023.

337 Ibid.

338 Toorawa, 2000, 20.

339 Ibid.

340 Ibid.

341 With whom he would form Usrat Tishreen (the October Troupe) later in 1973. See: Mas'ud Hamdan, *Poetics, Politics and Protest in Arab Theatre: The Bitter Cup and the Holy Rain*, East Sussex: 2008, 59.

Aleppo.³⁴² During the the Tripartite Aggression on Egypt³⁴³ Hajjo's troupe performed several plays with pungent satirical content such as *isti'mar fil asfourieh* (Occupation in the Madhouse) and *mabda' eisenhower* (The Eisenhower Principle)³⁴⁴ which were found to be most unsettling by both, the American embassy and Syrian authorities at the time, leading Hajjo to look for more indirect methods, such as pantomime, in order to present his ideas.³⁴⁵ In 1960, under the supervision of Nihad Qalei, the first official theatrical body (Directorate of Theaters and Music) was established with very modest means within the Syrian ministry of culture.³⁴⁶ Qalei was not very keen on imported avantgarde that is based on foreign texts, favoring a form of popular theater whose audience is not exclusively academic.

Eventually, Qalei succeeded in establishing the small but very significant Al-Qabbani stage in Damascus. When Omar Hajjo formed Masrah al-Shok, he worked together with Qalei to "create a third (middle) theater, which connects the academic with the popular, thereby creating a state of strong communication with the public using refined thought [Trans. Y. A.]."³⁴⁷ In his pioneering theatrical endeavor, Hajjo's creed was "to avoid both, lowering the bar and resorting to lofty symbolism [Trans. Y. A.]."³⁴⁸ His method of choice was to approach the ordinary and the everyday as he explains: "For that purpose I found it most appropriate to go into details of people's lives and talk about their concerns and problems [Trans. Y. A.]."³⁴⁹ Inspired by the Bolshevik Living Newspaper (Zhivaya Gazeta) and the European workers' theater,³⁵⁰ Hajjo's Thorns featured "short dramatic scenes, rapid and separate from each

342 Wissam Kanaan, "Tears of the Pantomime", *Al-Akhbar*, 2015, https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_People/109575, 15. 01. 2023.

343 Also "The Suez Crisis" and "The Sinai War" is an invasion of Egypt in late 1956 by Israel, the United Kingdom and France. See: David Abernathy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empires, 1415–1980*. Yale University Press, 2000.

344 The plays texts have not been published and are only to be found in secondary literature about Omar Hajjo, for instance in articles by Syrian journalist and screenwriter Wissam Kanaan (see f.n. 340).

345 Kannan, *Al-Akhabar*, 2015.

346 Nidal Qushha, "Nihad Qalei, Founder of the Syrian National Theater", *Al-Arab*, issue 11598, 2020, <https://alarab.co.uk/%D9%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%82%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AF-%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9>, 02. 01. 2023.

347 Omar Hajjo quoted after Maher Mansour, "Omar Hajjo, Founder and Witness", *The New Arab*, 2015, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%B1-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D9%91%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B3%D9%91%D8%B3-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF>, 02. 01. 2023.

348 Ibid.

349 Ibid.

350 Which was heavily influenced by Vsevolod Meyerhold and Vladimir Mayakovsky as well as Bertolt Brecht. See: Stuart Cosgrove, *The Living Newspaper: History, Production, and Form*, Hull 1982, 7ff.

other”,³⁵¹ with the aim of exposing various social and political errors. On the professional level, an important aspect of this project was “the collective writing of texts by a team of actors that takes into account the view and suggestions of the audience”.³⁵²

Aesthetically, Masrah al-Shok adopted a number of distinctive elements that had always been present in Arabic theatricality, such as “carnavalesque qualities”, radical “juxtaposition of art and life” and “the lack of complete separation between spectators and actors”.³⁵³ Few years later, Hajjo joined *Usrat Tishreen* (October Troupe) whose prominent plays were written by Muhammad Al-Maghout.

Roger Allen observes that “[b]ecause Wannūs was such a crucially important figure, other Syrian and Lebanese dramatists of the latter half of the 20th century operated somewhat in his shadow”,³⁵⁴ with the exception of very few, most prominently Muḥammad Al-Māghout (1934–2006),³⁵⁵ whose work played an important role in keeping drama “an invaluable outlet for popular sentiment and creative energy”.³⁵⁶ Poetry, fiction, play and screenwriting intermingle in Al-Maghout’s political literature, where he “combines satire with descriptions of social misery and malaise, illustrating what he viewed as an ethical decline among the region’s rulers”.³⁵⁷ Arabists Leslie Tramontini and Stephan Milich study Al-Maghout’s poetry, observing “a refusal to bend to the diktat imposed by the police state, narrow-minded ideology, and a repressive society”.³⁵⁸ One of the best examples of this attitude is Al-Maghout’s poem “*al-qatl*” (The Killing), which was written on a cigarette paper during his imprisonment by the Syrian regime in 1955. The poem depicts “a world of horrors that, notwithstanding its apocalyptic and surreal metaphorical language, hints at the gradual militarization of society and state”.³⁵⁹

In 1965, Al-Maghout started writing one-act plays, some of which were performed in Lebanon, then he began collaborating with Nihad Qalei and Duraid Lahham, with whom he

351 A. Al-‘Ushri, “an al-masrah al tahridi” (theater of incitement), *Alam al-Fikr* (4–6, 1987), 124–34, quoted after Hamdan, 2008, 59.

352 Hamdan, 2008, 59.

353 Hamdan, 2008, 59f.

354 Allen, “Arabic Literature: Drama”, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Arabic-literature/Drama>. 02. 12. 2022.

355 Leslie Tramontini; Stephan Milich, “Writing against Injustice and Oppression. On the Literary Commitment of Muḥaffar al-Nawwāb and Muḥammad al-Māghūt”, *Al-Abhath* 62–63, 2014, 103–133, 104.

356 Ibid.

357 Eyad N. Al-Samman, “Mohammed Al-Maghout, the Syrian Poet with a Satiric Pen”, Arab World Books, 2009, <https://www.arabworldbooks.com/en/e-zine/mohammed-al-maghout-the-syrian-poet-with-a-satiric-pen>, 02. 12. 2022.

358 Tramontini; Milich, 2014, 118.

359 Ibid.

formed Usrat Tishreen (October Troupe) in 1973. The group produced “some of the region’s most popular and acclaimed theatrical works”,³⁶⁰ most prominently *day‘at tishreen*³⁶¹ (October Village), 1974, *ghurba*³⁶² (Expatriation), 1975, *kasak ya watan*³⁶³ (Cheers Homeland), 1979 and *shaqa‘iq al nu‘man*³⁶⁴ (Poppies), 1983. As is the case with most Arabic popular plays, the texts have not been published, but most performances were filmed and broadcast repeatedly – almost regularly – on several Arabic television channels for many years. Today they are available on Duraid Lahham’s official channel on Youtube.³⁶⁵ The plays are famous for their bitter criticism of the alienation of Arab citizens at home, the great distance that separates people from their rulers, and many hints to false revolutionaries and opportunists climbing on the shoulders of crushed masses to attain political and financial gains. The featured sarcastic dialogues, poetic monologues, songs, puns and word play became a part of the collective memory and everyday language in the Levant.

Academic work on Al-Maghout and Usrat Tishreen is extremely rare. Mas’ud Hamdan is a lecturer at the Hebrew University and Haifa University, specialized in modern Arabic and Hebrew political theater and cinema. In *Poetics, Politics and Protest in Arab Theatre*,³⁶⁶ Hamdan devotes several chapters to explore this topic. In the plays of October Troupe, Hamdan sees a strong connection to the work of Syrian theater pioneer Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani, where the “element of musicality and dance” is strongly present, forming “another link in the generic chain of historical continuity”.³⁶⁷ Another connection is seen in the “chronotpe of the market, the coffee-house and the bath-house known from the shadow theatre”. But most prominently in “the chronotope of the jail-house”,³⁶⁸ which exists in many Al-Qabbani plays. This configuration manifests in Al-Maghout as the political prison, which reflects his personal experience as a political detainee in Syria.³⁶⁹

360 Al-Samman, Arab World Books, 2009.

361 *Day‘at tishreen* (October Village), 1974, Duraid Lahham’s official Youtube channel, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w95fq2VJZkQ>, 03. 02. 2023.

362 *Ghurba* (Expatriation), 1975, Duraid Lahham’s official Youtube channel, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BFIJjphTuQ>, 03. 02. 2023.

363 *Kasak ya watan* (Cheers Homeland), 1979, Duraid Lahham’s official Youtube channel, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ue—9uBd_M0, 03. 02. 2023.

364 *Shaqa‘iq al nu‘man* (Poppies), 1983, Duraid Lahham’s official Youtube channel, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJUZ2c3pUDQ>, 03. 02. 2023.

365 Duraid Lahham’s official Youtube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/@Duraidlaham>, 03. 02. 2023.

366 Hamdan, 2008.

367 Hamdan, 2008, 57.

368 Ibid.

369 See: Tramontini; Milich, 2014, 118.

Moreover, Hamdan draws on the strategy and impact of the October Troupe by observing the development of the character Ghawwar Al Toshe (Duraid Lahham), who starred in most of Al-Maghout work, and the exceptional amount of influence he had on his audience, as well as the carnivalesque and linguistic aspects of the plays and the relation between political satire and the context in which it took place, in other words, the relation between art and authority. In talk of Ghawwar's unprecedented level of popularity and impact in the Arabic world, Hamdan observes how the "tragic-comic satirist"³⁷⁰ undergoes a transition from a "gay rogue" in his early stage and television roles into a "tragic fool"³⁷¹ in Al-Maghout's plays. This multifaceted figure was constantly able to create "moments of tear-inducing catharsis filled with pathos that sparkles and releases waves of laughter among spectators", thereby producing a stage persona able to "live in the collective memory as a cultural code and as a popular-national asset".³⁷²

Despite his simple tone and focus on the labouring class, Al-Maghout's influential theatrical formula was not exactly simple. Ghawwar, the hero of most of his work "identifies with the common people and places"³⁷³ in every medium. At the center of all plays is a "Tantalian longing to return to a natural state of a simple and integrated collective".³⁷⁴ Ghawwar's "belittling" attack on the social/political reality in the Arabic world, and his aspirations for a better one, provided his audience with the "two vital commodities that the masses were most in need of".³⁷⁵ Most remarkably, the strategies of Al-Maghout's political drama as manifested in the plays of Usrat Tishreen created a theater that is able to reach both, critics and viewers, thereby remaining faithful to the founding principle of *Masrah al-Shok*.³⁷⁶ Hamdan observes that "[t]he mixture of festive criticism and presentation of the populist utopian vision through the stratagem of hierarchical reversal in his works, may explain perhaps more than anything else his success among intellectuals as well as ordinary people".³⁷⁷

Tramontini and Milich maintain that while Al-Maghout's poetry is "pervaded by sorrow", his theater is "shaped by carnivalesque wit".³⁷⁸ This observation is perfectly aligned with

370 Hamdan, 2008, 65.

371 Hamdan, 2008, 61.

372 Hamdan, 2008, 65.

373 Hamdan, 2008, 68.

374 Ibid.

375 Hamdan, 2008, 69.

376 Cf. p. 47.

377 Hamdan, 2008, 69.

378 Ibid.

Hamdan's views: Relying on Mikhail Bakhtin,³⁷⁹ Hamdan defines the carnival "in its wider sense" as an "expression of unofficial ideology that develops in communication or dialogue", and sees in Al-Maghout's plays a "carnavalesque strategy, through which the single, 'official truth' is destroyed [...] by means of confrontation with a host of unofficial truths and their dominance over it".³⁸⁰ These unofficial truths are presented as "low-level popular multi-vocalness (polyphony)", relying on basic carnivalesque categories to launch its attack at the main narrative, namely: Destroying familiarity, or "the overturning of the hierarchical order of characters", the "mixture of types (misalliances)", ambivalence or the "unity of opposites",³⁸¹ comic sacrilege, and the use of eccentric settings, situations and characters.

In an attempt to expose the regime's propaganda as conveyed by the government's media, the October plays juxtapose colloquial terms with high language of political slogans, which are presented as empty and hypocritical. In many scenes, colloquial is used in a fusion with foreign languages and along literary Arabic. This is most evident in *day'at tishreen* (October Village) 1974,³⁸² where "characters burst into song, conduct trade, and study grammar at the same time",³⁸³ but also in *kasak ya watan* (Cheers Homeland) 1979,³⁸⁴ "where the advertisements are scattered through the songs, programs, interviews, proverbs, political 'weather reports', news in poetic forms, dramatic scenes, dance, etc.". These huge portions of chaos make it difficult to tell the difference among all happenings, as they are "combined into one organic aesthetic whole".³⁸⁵ Al-Maghout's linguistic circus also uses well-known dialogues and "parodies of texts" in addition to "backward quotations, contrasts and combinations of Oxymoron".³⁸⁶

Featuring "[t]he collective as a grotesque body",³⁸⁷ which is constantly abused by the system, Al-Maghout's *ghurba* (Expatriation), 1975³⁸⁸ is perhaps his most prominent attempt to highlight the corruption of Arabic left. The play merges "calls for the solidarity of the people to build the country through toil and sweat" with "a naturalistic description of a miserable mental-physical existence of a representative cross-section of the lower classes".³⁸⁹

379 See: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Bloomington 1984.

380 Hamdan, 2008, 79.

381 Ibid.

382 *Day'at tishreen* (October Village), 1974, Youtube, 2019.

383 Hamdan, 2008, 101.

384 *Kasak ya watan* (Cheers Homeland), 1979, Youtube, 2019.

385 Hamdan, 2008, 101.

386 Hamdan, 2008, 81.

387 Hamdan, 2008, 87.

388 *Ghurba* (Expatriation), 1975, Youtube, 2019.

389 Hamdan, 2008, 98.

Furthermore, the arbitrary, almost comic manner in which the state maintains its basic functions is heavily satirized. In the second scene of the second act of *ghurba*, a doctor is invited by the cooperative farm to conduct an annual examinations on the citizens. In order to save time and effort, the doctor decides to examine everybody at once under the slogan: ““for one people, one examination””.³⁹⁰ The diagnosis resulting from this collective health check is that the residents are all suffering a severe case of appendicitis.³⁹¹

The unity of opposites, a theatrical device often employed by Al-Maghout to address the absurd social and political reality, is an extremely playful method which becomes especially functional when the order of characters is being overturned, or when characters are being collectively unmasked. Hamdan observes such a process in all plays of Usrat Tishreen, where “[a]t the end, the gap between the mask and its owner opens up: The fool is revealed as the wise man, the alienated eccentric as the familiar and the authentic. The dead man is alive and the drunk is the most aware of all”.³⁹² Such is the “lie festival” in the fourth scene of *ghurba*,³⁹³ where a teacher who arrives during one of the village parties, celebrating lies, announces that this event is morally wrong, and that the festival should instead be devoted to truth. But the new established festival of truth soon turns to a rough quarrel among the celebrating crowd, due to the embarrassing revelations and scandals which are now being exposed. Here, Al-Bek,³⁹⁴ the head of the festival, interferes to calm everyone down by suggesting that all should be forgotten and that from now on, we shall assume “that all the truths that were spoken were lies, and that all lies were true”.³⁹⁵ The suggestion is widely accepted and the celebration continues from it stopped.

Finally, the plays take special care to comment on signs of decline in the Arabic social and political life, such as the ever-growing gap between the governments and the people. Lebanese-British historian Albert Hourani describes the political state which characterizes such decline as follows:

“there was a tendency for rulers, as they settled into power, to become more secretive and withdrawn – guarded by their security services and surrounded by intimates and officials who controlled access to them – and to emerge only rarely to give a formal justification of their actions to a docile audience”.³⁹⁶

390 Hamdan, 2008, 88.

391 Ibid.

392 Hamdan, 2008, 91.

393 *Ghurba* (Expatriation), 1975, Youtube, 2019.

394 A Turkic honorific title meaning Chief or Commander that is commonly used in the Arab world.

395 Hamdan, 2008, 99.

396 Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab People*, London 1991, 451.

Another sign of state decline is the air of instability blowing over the political landscape and rendering it completely dysfunctional, as Al-Maghout suggests in *day‘at tishreen* (October Village), 1974.³⁹⁷ Here is a grocery shop owner (Abu-Narah) trying to hang the picture of the ruler of the country on the wall, in front of his shop – a common practice under dictatorships in the Middle East – when he gets interrupted by a radio announcement about a new revolution, bringing in a new ruler. Later, in a similar scene, and upon hearing yet another coup-announcement, the grocery owner “‘begs’: ‘at least give us time to frame the picture’”.³⁹⁸

With piercing content by Al-Maghout, the Syrian October Troupe moved the Arab masses in the 1970s. The way their performances were received is strongly related to their political content, for it was the first time that the exploitation of workers and the corruption of the ruling class had been addressed by drama in the Levant. The sharp wit, poetic dialogues, and extremely unusual phrasing made them popular among old and young audiences alike. Linguistic experiments were also practiced in Italy in the 1970s by the Transversalists and the Indiani Metropolitani group³⁹⁹ with the aim of creating a new type of communication that mocks all forms of organized politics.⁴⁰⁰ In Lebanon, similar attempts were made in the 1970s by composer, playwright and political commentator Ziad al-Rahbani.

5.3 Al-Rahbani Family

With their diva Nuha Haddad, known as Fairouz (b. c. 1933),⁴⁰¹ the Rahbani family⁴⁰² played a very distinctive role in the Arabic cultural scene since the 1950s.⁴⁰³ Their music also became known beyond the Arab world. Among other places, songs by the Rahbanis can be heard in the French film *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf*.⁴⁰⁴ The Rahbanis starting point was in 1949 at the Lebanese Near East Radio, where they started performing “sketches” and “radio operettas”⁴⁰⁵ that turned into huge musical extravaganzas in the next decade. In 1956, the Baalbeck

397 *Day‘at tishreen* (October Village), 1974, Youtube, 2019.

398 Hamdan, 2008, 116.

399 Cf. Klemens Gruber, “Eine schmutzige Sprache” in: *Die zerstreute Avantgarde. Strategische Kommunikation im Italien der 70er Jahre*, Wien: Böhlau 1989, 2. Aufl. 2010, 75–100.

400 Cf. Patrick Cuninghame, “‘A laughter that will bury you all’”: Irony as protest and language as struggle in the Italian 1977 movement”, *Libcom.org*, 2012, <https://libcom.org/history/laughter-will-bury-you-all-irony-protest-language-struggle-italian-1977-movement-1>, 27. 01. 2023.

401 Stone, 2007, 1.

402 Husband Asi Al-Rahbani (1923–86), son Ziad Al-Rahbani (b. 1956), and brother-in-law Mansour Al-Rahbani (1925–2009), Cf. Stone, 2007, 1.

403 See: “Fairouz and/as the Nation” in: Stone, 2007, 144.

404 *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf*, R.: Leos Carax, FR 1991; The Lovers on the Bridge Soundtrack Credit, *IMDB*, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0101318/soundtrack/?ref_=tt_trv_snd, 03. 02. 2023.

405 Stone, 2007, 49.

Festival, featuring only foreign troupes, took place in Lebanon for the first time.⁴⁰⁶ In 1957, brothers Asi and Mansour Al-Rahbani became the first Arabic artists to stage in Baalbeck.⁴⁰⁷ Their contribution was a series of musicals that showcased Lebanese folklore, which were later developed by Asi Rahbani to complete plots starring his wife Fairouz. The Rahbanis' plays eventually began to address politics with themes such as military 'coup-d'états', tyranny, corruption, elections, and revolution.⁴⁰⁸ As is the case with many Syrian theater endeavors and projects from that period, academic work on Al-Rahbani family is rare, but their oeuvre is available either on compact discs or as feature films on video-cassette and DVD, with published texts from Ziad Al Rahbani (second generation) plays and many press articles about the family covering both generations.

Christopher Stone, Associate Professor of Arabic and Head of the Arabic Division at the City University of New York, writes that "Fairouz and the Rahbanis were and continue to be key players in the protracted struggle over the identity of this new nation".⁴⁰⁹ Stone is careful to label his work on the Rahbani family as "a literary study in the context of area studies",⁴¹⁰ thereby adopting Edward Said's critical stance on American academic approach regarding the Orient, which ignores literature in favor of 'facts':

"One of the striking aspects of the new American social-science attention to the Orient is its singular avoidance of literature. You can read through reams of expert writing on the modern Near East and never encounter a single reference to literature. What seems to matter far more to the regional experts are 'facts,' of which a literary text is perhaps a disturber. The net effect of this remarkable omission in modern American awareness of the Arab or Islamic Orient is to keep the region and its people conceptually emasculated, reduced to 'attitudes,' 'trends,' statistics: in short, dehumanized".⁴¹¹

The selective, limited approach Said is criticizing is very reminiscent of the idea of "refugees theater", where artists from the Middle East are bound to certain roles based on their in German so called 'Herkunft', the place they 'actually' come from, which turns them into human clichés forced into a fixed context. This tendency is not limited to theater, but is also strongly present in European, particularly German-speaking academia. An example based on the author's personal experience as a student of Theater, Film and Media Studies at the University of Vienna, is the way images expressing the tragic situation of Syrian refugees,

406 See: Stone, 2007, 3.

407 Ibid.

408 Cf. Nabil Abu Murad, *al-akhawan Rahbani: hayat wa-masrah* (The Brothers Rahbani, Life and Theater), Beirut 1990, 10.

409 Stone, 2007, 1.

410 Stone, 2007, 9.

411 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York 1979, 291.

trying to reach Europe by land and sea,⁴¹² would often be used in the context of Film and Media Studies,⁴¹³ where, on the other hand, the interest in Arabic film and media is non-existent, even after receiving millions of Arabs into the continent and the resulting necessity to better understand modern Middle Eastern culture. This lacking approach created the motive for this research, which attempts to highlight the aspect of continuity in Arabic political theater.

Within this latter aspect, which have been pointed out in earlier chapters with regard to the work of Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani, Saadallah Wannous and the October Troupe and referenced by Arabic scholars such as Al-Maleh, Al-Rai and Hamdan,⁴¹⁴ it is also important to point out the link between Al-Rahbani family and earlier forms of Arabic theater of the nineteenth century, which “continues in the form of a cultural back-and-forth between Egypt and the Levant right up through the modest beginnings of the Rahbani Brothers’ musical-theatrical performances in their town of Antilyas and their initial sketches on Near East Radio”.⁴¹⁵ This is especially evident in the Rahbanis’ connection to the work of Egyptian composer and musical theater playwright Sayyid Darwish (1892–1923),⁴¹⁶ who spoke against social injustice and wrote music reflecting the life and work conditions of the masses, especially the labouring class.⁴¹⁷

5.3.1 Ziad Al-Rahbani’s popular avantgarde

Since the end of the Lebanese civil war in the 1980s, Ziad al-Rahbani, son of Fairouz and Asi Rahbani has been considered a highly notable political voice in Lebanon. Ziad began participating in his parents’ musicals in 1972.⁴¹⁸ His contribution to art and media is quite diverse, ranging from radio commentary to theater, television appearances and political columns in the Lebanese press.⁴¹⁹ One could argue that Ziad’s work during and after the war

412 Such as the case of Alan Kurdi, and the dead bodies found repeatedly in trucks and good transporters.

413 As refugees would be paraded on stage.

414 See f.n. 1, 2, 365.

415 Stone, 2007, 49.

416 Habeeb Salloum, “Sayyed Darwish: The Father Of Modern Arab Music”, *Al Jadid, A Review and Record of Arab Culture and Arts*, Vol. 7, No. 36, 2001, available at: <https://www.aljadid.com/content/sayyed-darwish-father-modern-arab-music>, 23. 01. 2023.

417 Cf. Ibid.

418 See: Stone, 2007, 93.

419 Most prominently in the newspaper *Al Akhbar*, available at: <https://www.al-akhbar.com/Author/427>, 23.01.2023, and *Assafir*, <https://archive.assafir.com/#/summary?pageSize=16&pageNumber=1&order=DESC&sortBy=relevance&searchWithin=title&searchWithin=keywords&value=%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AF%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AD%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A>, 23. 01. 2023.

has helped creating a new Arab pop culture⁴²⁰ with clear Marxist threads. In theater, Ziad's "exceedingly popular"⁴²¹ work sought to dissimulate "the fantasy of a monolingual and monocultural Lebanon"⁴²² represented by his parents' plays. Stone observes that "[t]he war prompted nostalgia for prewar Lebanon. Suddenly, the 1960s were a golden age, a different Lebanon from that of 1975 onward. Ziad's polyvocal, parodic, and acerbic musical-theatrical works of the 1970s and early 1980s worked hard to argue that these two Lebanons were one and the same".⁴²³

Although music and song are strongly present in almost all of his plays, Ziad's theater can be seen as the antithesis of that of his parents — with one of the plays, *shi feshil* (A Failure), 1983,⁴²⁴ being a direct, extremely sharp parody of the Rahbanis' utopian village, their national sentiment and concept of patriotism. The music and dance element utilized by Ziad is also fundamentally different to that which is seen in the typical Rahbani musicals of the 1960s and the 1970s, with their professional orchestra and highly organized folk dances, which are performed with an almost martial discipline.⁴²⁵ In comparison, Ziad's singers are often slightly disharmonious and his ensemble can always burst into random dances in its entirety and in a completely chaotic manner.⁴²⁶

Another point of departure from the parents' theater is Ziad Rahbani's anti-illusionistic approach and almost shocking realism. In *nazl al-surur* (Pleasure Hotel) 1974,⁴²⁷ second act, "we enter the realm of the political, albeit comically, when two recently fired factory workers – 'Abbas and Fahd – storm the hotel proclaiming the start of a revolution".⁴²⁸ The guests of

420 Cf. Sune Haugbølle, "Ziad al-Rahbani and the Liberal Subject" in: Hatina M., Schumann C. (Ed.), *Arab Liberal Thought after 1967*, New York, 2015, 177–194.

421 Stone, 2007, 1.

422 Stone, 2007, 93.

423 Stone, 2007, 2.

424 Ziad Rahbani, *shi fashil*, Beirut 1994d. Also available on compact disc: Ziad Rahbani, (1993c) *Failure... Complete Original Cast Recording* by Ziad Rahbani. 2 records, performed by Z. Rahbani, J. Saqr, Z. Abu 'Absi, M. Sa'idun, et al., produced by A. Samaha, Beirut: Voice of Beirut, VOBCD 526–7.

425 See for instance *mays el reem* (play) 1975 by Asi and Mansour Al-Rahbani, directed by Antoine Remy, starring Fairouz, Nasri Shamseddine, Hoda Haddad, Joseph Saqr, 06:45, rare video excerpt available at: https://m.facebook.com/11fadi11/videos/%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%8%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A-%D9%A1%D9%A9%D9%A7%D9%A5/2183948398509952/video_source=permalink&locale=zh_CN, 12. 02. 2023.

426 See for instance *Bennesbe la boukra shu* (What Do We Do Tomorrow?), 1978, written and directed by Ziad Al-Rahbani, starring Joseph Saqr, Nabila Zeitouni, Samy Hawwat, 01:12:35, available at: <https://youtu.be/bQQbNYygvbg?t=4355>, 12. 02. 2023.

427 Ziad Rahbani, (1994c), *nazl al-surur*, Beirut: Mukhtarar. Also available on compact disc: Ziad Rahbani, (1993b) *L'auberge du bonheur: Complete Original Cast Recording of the Popular Musical Play*, 2 records, performed by Z. Rahbani, J. Saqr, et al., produced by A. Chahine and Fils, Beirut: Voix de l'Orient Series, VDLC 558–9.

428 Stone, 2007, 100.

the hotel are given time till next morning to decide whether they are going to join the said revolution or die. Among the guests are two musicians, who are commissioned with writing an anthem for this new ‘movement’ until 3:30 in the morning.⁴²⁹ When the two revolutionaries go to check if the anthem has been composed, Tinu, the hotel clerk interferes to ask one of them to consider an offer, which involves getting married to the hotel owner’s rich daughter:

“Marry, establish a home and settle down... and later if one night while you are sitting in front of the television and you begin thinking about your people get up... and then start planning your revolution. At that time the revolution will be more mature and maybe it will last longer than a day, and at least you’ll have a place to convene your revolutionary council”.⁴³⁰

Ziad’s next play *bennesbe la boukra shu* (What Do We Need to Do Tomorrow), 1977⁴³¹ attained unprecedented popularity. The play was “performed daily to full houses for at least six months”,⁴³² thereby “breaking box-office records for Lebanese theater”.⁴³³ Here, Ziad points a finger at the tourist/service economy and the commodification of Lebanese culture as an underlying reason for poverty.⁴³⁴ In *film ameriki taweel* (A Long American Film), 1979,⁴³⁵ Rashid, a patient residing at a psychiatric hospital, refuses the common narrative that masses are innocent victims of their political leaders, arguing that people of all classes are equally responsible for the (extremely poor) state of their country. The main conclusion to be drawn with regard to Lebanon being: Through their lack of ethics, prevailing opportunism, and support of the sectarian system and its sub-structures, all members of the Lebanese society are participating in an imminent, collective decline.⁴³⁶

That said, the play is not at all oblivious to the money question: In the featured song “ya zaman el ta’ifiyi” (In Times of Sectarianism),⁴³⁷ the extremely sarcastic lyrics point out how the sectarian system dominating the country seems to have “affected all aspects of life except for financial transactions”.⁴³⁸ Stone translates this statement as: “In the time of sectarianism,

429 Rahbani, Z. 1994c, 35ff.

430 Rahbani, Z. 1994c, 73, quoted after Stone, 2007, 101.

431 Ziad Rahbani, *bi-al-nisba li-bukra shu* (What Do We Do Tomorrow?), Beirut 1994a.

432 A. Shukr Allah, “Bi-al-nisba li-bukra shu?” masrahiyya ahsanat al-tasdid”, *Al-Tariq*, 37(4–5), 1978, 259–67, quoted after Stone, 2007, 110.

433 S. Kamil, “Ziad Rahbani, mustaqbaluna al-fanni” (Ziad Rahbani, Our Artistic Future), *Jaridat al-shira’* (newspaper), December 29, 1986, 82, quoted after Stone, 2007, 111.

434 Cf. Stone, 2007, 120, 124.

435 Ziad Rahbani, *film Amirki tawil* (A Long American Film), Beirut 1994b. Also available on compact disc: Rahabani, Z. (1993a) *The American Motion Picture: Complete Original Cast Recording of the Popular Musical Play*. 3 records, performed by Z. Rahbani, J. Saqr, S. Hawwat, Z. Abu ‘Absi, et al., produced by A.J. Samaha, Beirut: Voice of Beirut, VOBCD 523–5.

436 Cf. Rahbani, Z. 1994b, 45f.

437 Rahabani, Z. 1993a.

438 Stone, 2007, 121.

keep your hand on your identification card... Hold it as tightly as you can... Look at the lira, oh how beautiful it is, it cuts from here to there”.⁴³⁹ This is a literal translation which, corrected, would be: “Look at the lira, oh how beautiful it is, it crosses from here to there [Trans. Y. A.]”.⁴⁴⁰ This act of ‘crossing’ is a reference to the state of the capital Beirut during the Lebanese civil war, where the city was divided into ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ parts, with barricades guarded by militias, making it extremely difficult and dangerous to move between the two areas. However, this risk does not apply to financial transactions, which, as the song suggests, were carried out without any interruption (business as usual).

Finally, a very striking feature of Ziad’s works are linguistic experiments, where ordinary phrases are broken and reformed, words and idioms are taken out of context and restored in a purely subversive or totally absurd manner. Here, language is not considered as means but as practice.⁴⁴¹ Author and critic Rafiq Anini comments on Ziad’s unusual faculty for linguistic diversity:

“This characteristic shows itself first in his use of lexical items from the depths of popular language, second in the composition of his sentences and dialogues and lastly in the variety of dialects and playing with foreign accents: the mountain dialect, the southern dialect, the village dialect, the Armenian and Italian accents, the defective pronunciation of French and American accents, etc.”.⁴⁴²

Whatever the medium he used to convey his ideas, Ziad Al-Rahbani’s heteroglossia is a dominant characteristic of all his output. The “focus on the word as opposed to the spectacle may help to explain the great popularity that his works enjoyed both on the radio and on cassette tapes”,⁴⁴³ especially during the Lebanese civil war, where radio was an essential medium and the staging of plays was incredibly difficult.⁴⁴⁴ By attempting to destroy conventions both in art and in everyday life, and by producing art that mocked and defied the social, political and cultural norms, Al-Rahbani managed to have a long-lasting influence on young people. His core ideas, dialogues and song lyrics remain strongly present in the Arabic pop culture today, both in the Middle East and in European exile, where he toured in 2019 playing to full houses in the Netherlands, Paris and Berlin.⁴⁴⁵

439 Ibid.

440 Rahbani, Z. 1994b, 161.

441 Cf. *Kollektiv A/traverso, Alice ist der Teufel. Praxis einer subversiven Kommunikation. Radio Alice (Bologna)*, Übersetzt von Francesco Carotta und Karl Friedrich Kassel, Berlin 1977, 119ff.

442 Rafiq ‘Anini, “Ru’yat al-hayat wa-al-fann fi masrah Ziad Rahbani,” (Visions of Life and Art in Ziad Al-Rahbani’s Theater), *Al-Tariq*, 48(6) and 49(1): 147–62 and 175–96, 148–9, quoted after Stone, 2007, 136.

443 Stone, 2007, 117.

444 Cf. Ibid.

445 See fig. 11 in appendix.

6. Conclusion: Value Generating Patterns in Arabic Political Theater as Guide and Context for Contemporary Theatrical Endeavors

This conclusion is a summary of the central findings of all five chapters, including essential statements and things I have experienced and learned during the work process, as well as open questions that could be examined and answered through further research. While dealing with the topic of Arabic theater in European academia and cultural field, I have come across a tendency to generalize in regards to foreign cultures, religions and certain social/political contexts, which often results in a limited approach in dealing with the “other”. This tendency manifests in the act of focusing on certain aspects of the subject in question while completely neglecting others. Coupled with my experience in the Viennese independent theater, this observation led me to the conclusion, that such limited approach will often generate an error-prone and consequently failed communication when dealing with the foreign factor, whereby the common sentimental attitude, which exclusively views this factor through Christian lenses is equally out of place. By illuminating the historical context of Arabic political theater, this research is an attempt to address that lack in perception.

In the beginning of this research, where the main question is presented and the work structure is described, the unstable relationship between East and West is brought up. While covering the state of research of Arabic political theater, which tackled this issue repeatedly throughout its history, I came across a number of gaps, but also a few sincere efforts to bridge those gaps. For instance the recent publications about Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani, founder of Syrian theater. When dealing with the problem of the large geographical scope of the term “Arabic”, I found the remarks of American teatrologist Marvin Carlson to be quite relevant. The best solution in the case at hand was to state that focus of my work lies on the Levant, while acknowledging the central role of Egypt in Arabic culture.

A deep and thorough look at the beginnings of Arabic shadow play directed me to the work of medieval shadow theater artist Ibn Daniyal. This examination of one of the most distinguished Arabic theater forms proved to be quite relevant for later chapters, as it showed a number of important aspects of Arabic theatricality which were already visible in the times of Ibn Daniyal, for instance:

- The heavy use of humor/political satire
- Reflecting on the past
- Capacity for experimentation
- Anti-authoritarianism
- Unconventional use of language
- Musicality
- Interactivity

Additionally, I came across common aspects with *Commedia dell'Arte* and classical Greek literature, with strong erotic tones defying religious authorities, which sought to smother art and entertainment through censorship and prosecution. Most importantly, this research finds, Ibn Daniyal produced an early form of the refined, yet highly popular theatrical event. This unity of opposites will emerge repeatedly in later instances of Levantine theater such as the work of Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani, *Masrah Al Shok* (Theater of Thorns), *Usrat Tishreen* (October Troupe) and the Rahbani family.

While examining the life and work of Syrian theater pioneer Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani and his struggle with Damascene conservatives in the 19th century, it became apparent that Al-Qabbani's portrayal of authority figures and the participatory aspects of his theater made him a threat to the ruling class and forced him to relocate. In Egypt, a thriving economic and cultural hub at the time, Al-Qabbani resumed his theatrical activity while facing a completely different challenge, namely, the heavy and dominant foreign presence. A glimpse on available literature covering Al-Qabbani's activity during this period shows that the artist's rejection of adapted texts, and his adherence to Arabic language and heritage as inspiration for his plays, made him a strong rival to European troupes, who were competing for the main venues and sponsorship by the Egyptian government.

Beside introducing the first professional theater and reviving a number of Arabic literary and performance forms, Al-Qabbani's central achievement, this research finds, is the introduction of female performers, divas, musicians and dancers. Here, the graceful presence of oriental muses who starred in Al-Qabbani's plays in Egypt and the United States is highlighted. A necessary elaboration is made on the case of Munira El Mahdeya, the first Muslim woman on Arabic stage, Badia Masabni, a most influential performer and show-business woman, and the politically laden life and art of actress/belly dancer Tahiya Carioca.

While researching the work of Saadallah Wannous, one of the most prominent Arabic theater artists of the 1960s and the 1970s, the connection to Syrian theater of the 19th century became obvious (see chapter 5.1). This connection supports the idea of continuity in Arabic political theater. In turn, during the course of research, it had come to my attention that Levantine theater of the 1960s and the 1970s is regarded as highly influential by many Arab artists in German-speaking exile today, among others Johnny Mhanna (Werk-X, Wiener Festwochen) and Zainab Al Sawah (Universität der Künste Berlin, Oldenburgisches Staatstheater). The young actors' affinity to the protagonists of this period became evident during lengthy conversations about their careers in Austria and Germany, and as I helped Mhanna translate a job application, in which he refers to the work of Wannous and his contemporaries as a source of great inspiration.

Just like the work of Arabic theater pioneers, the majority of Syrian and Lebanese popular, non-commercial theater is largely ignored by the canon. Most prominently the political cabaret project Masrah Al Shok and the highly satirical plays of Usrat Tishreen. While looking into the history, style and work principles of those two projects, I came across the previously mentioned characteristics of Arabic theatricality (see p. 59), thereby observing several connections to earlier political theater in the region. Apart from similarities in aesthetics and style, a most remarkable aspect of these endeavors is their ability to attain great popularity without delving into the commercial. Conversely, while tackling sophisticated subjects, this theater did not abandon the masses to join the stagnant sphere of cultural elite, which indicates its capacity to deal with the cultural and the political without losing touch with the social.

With this in mind, I managed to connect the Lebanese cultural phenomenon Al-Rahbani family with focus on the second generation (Ziad Al-Rahbani, b. 1956) to all of the above. Al-Rahbani's heavy social and political satire as well as his musicality and uncommon use of language are another indication of continuity in Arabic theatricality. His ability to attain immense popularity while avoiding commercialism, redundancy and vulgarity is reminiscent of the highest value Arabic political theater has been able to offer.

One of the most challenging aspects of this research was the scarcity of sources and academic studies on Arabic theater outside the realm of "high culture", regardless how popular or influential the subject may be and even when dealing with instances which succeeded in steering away from commercialism. A great amount of relevant literature and extensive

research which has been conducted in the past decade is available only in Arabic, such as works by Syrian historian Taissier Khalaf on Arabic theater in the 19th century (see f.n. 40), while most play texts from the 1960s and the 1970s have not been published and exist only as video or audio recordings. This indicates a strong need for both academic and literary translation in this field.

Finally, theater that criticizes and challenges both local dictatorship and authorities of foreign occupation, thus engaging in political activity, and theatrical endeavors by Arab artists and professionals who were forced into European exile, must be seen as branches of the same tree. And whereas the focus of this research lies on the past as origin and context, much work is needed to analyze and document the activity of Arabic theater professionals in European exile, which should supplement existing literature within the frames of post-migrant theater, inter-cultural thought and multilingual theater. Here are important questions relating to the links between Arabic and European cultures and the evolvement of European theater with Arab actors since 2015, and a need for better understanding of two different factors: Migrants/refugees on the one hand and associations committed to supporting underprivileged artists on the other, with questions relating to working conditions, resources distribution and cultural politics. Reports about stagings since 2015 including one or several artists with Arabic background, as well as interviews with artists and producers, are instrumental in creating a clear perception of this emerging landscape, and in extracting knowledge about multiple aspects concerning the Arab factor within European cultural scene: From production and grants to dramaturgical work, audience reception and critical response.

This research is meant as a contribution to theater studies in Western Europe, which has become home to a large number of Arabic artists today. Unlike most publications dealing with the topic, it does not rely on identity politics, rather on both, Arabic and western theater theory and history. The aim is to create a wholesome perception of Arabic artists' presence and activity in the region: One that is not solely based on appearance and sexual orientation, rather considerate of the very long history and magnificent dimensions of Arabic culture, which have almost totally been submerged in matters of war and migration/refugee politics, after being extensively examined and highly appreciated by scientific missions, orientalist and world travelers in earlier, different times. It is an attempt to move past narratives of marginalization and victimhood towards a sober, confident and impartial representation.

7. Appendix

7.1 Figures for chapter 3.1 (Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani and the Damascene fundamentalists)



Figure 1: Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani, father of Syrian theater

Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani (1835–1902), father of Syrian theater, source: Taissier Khalaf, *min dimashq ila chicago, rihlat abi khalil al qabbani ila america 1893* (From Damascus to Chicago, Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani's Journey to America 1893), Beirut 2018, 173.



Figure 2: Damascus Palace in Midway Plaisance 1893

Damascus Palace in Midway Plaisance 1893, Chicago World's Fair (World's Columbian Exposition, May 1, 1893–October 30, 1893), source: Taissier Khalaf, *min dimashq ila chicago, rihlat abi khalil al qabbani ila america 1893* (From Damascus to Chicago, Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani's Journey to America 1893), Beirut 2018, 181. Courtesy of The Benjamin Ives Gilman Collection Recorded at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University.

7.2 Figures for chapter 3.2 (Arabic theater in a European Egypt)

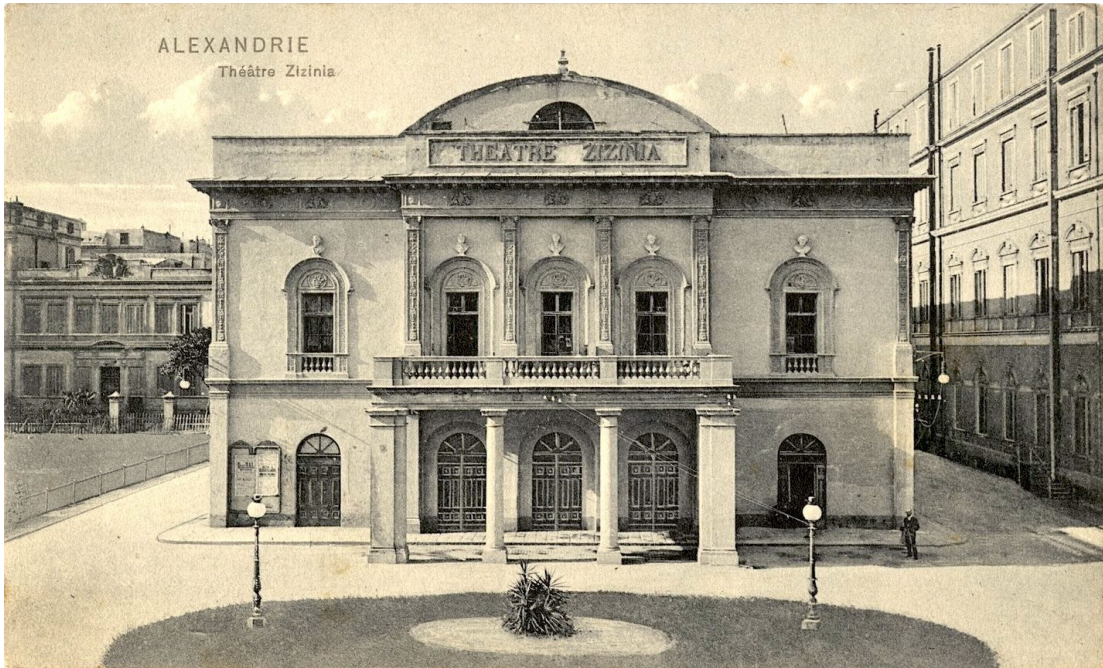


Figure 3: Théâtre Zizinia, La Scala of Alexandria

Théâtre Zizinia, La Scala of Alexandria, source: Paolo Petrocelli, "The origins of opera houses in Egypt", Jun 6, 2020, <https://medium.com/@paolopetrocelli/the-origins-of-opera-houses-in-egypt-36a49eb01db5>, 12. 02. 2023.

7.3 Figures for chapter 4 (Oriental Muses and Their Rebellious Offspring)



Figure 4: Esthara (Tirah) Al Hakim, Chicago World's Fair 1893

Esthara (Tirah) Al Hakim, Chicago World's Fair (World's Columbian Exposition, May 1, 1893–October 30, 1893), source: Taissier Khalaf, *min dimashq ila chicago, rihlat abi khalil al qabbani ila america 1893* (From Damascus to Chicago, Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani's Journey to America 1893), Beirut 2018, 182. Courtesy of The Benjamin Ives Gilman Collection Recorded at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University.



Figure 5: Munira El Mahdeya with musicians c. 1915

Munira El Mahdeya with musicians Zakaria Ahmed and Mohamed El Qasabgi c. 1915, source: Karawya, Fairouz “*awalem am mutribat?*” (Divas or Courtesans?), Mada Masr, 2022, <https://mada33.appspot.com/www.madamasr.com/ar/2022/11/26/feature/%D8%AB%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A9/%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A3%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%9F/?fbclid=IwAR3rKCeREvSO-Ih071rq0wd41Bfg3X55RCfFX9KjrrIkCknr-wQ1ReA5c84>, 02. 12. 2022.



Figure 6: Badia Masabni posing as an odalisque, Cairo, 1960.

Artist and show-business woman Badia Masabni as an odalisque, Cairo, 1960, source: *Arab Week* magazine, Beirut, Abboudi Bou Jawde collection. (Credit: Abboudi Bou Jawde photo via the Arab World Institute), source: Khouri, Stéphanie, “Badia Masabni, the fallen queen of belly dancing”, *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 2022, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1309028/badia-masabni-the-fallen-queen-of-belly-dancing.html>, 05. 12. 2022.



Figure 7: Actress and belly dancer Tahiya Carioca c. 1935
 Actress and belly dancer Tahiya Carioca c. 1935, source: <https://alchetron.com/Taheyya-Kariokka#taheyya-kariokka-42091f48-bfa5-4214-a429-0604cd477d1-resize-750.jpeg>, 13. 01. 2023.

7.4 Figures for chapter 5.2 (Syrian political cabaret and drama: Theater of Thorns and the October Troupe)



Figure 8: Usrat Tishreen in *Ghurba* (Expatriation), Damascus 1975.

Usrat Tishreen (October Troupe) in *Ghurba* (Expatriation), Damascus 1975, source: Mansour, Maher, “Omar Hajjo, al mu’assis wal shahid” (“Omar Hajjo, Founder and Witness”), The New Arab, 2015, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%B1-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D9%91%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B3%D9%91%D8%B3-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF>, 12. 02. 2023.

7.5 Figures for chapter 5.3 (Al-Rahbani Family)



Figure 9: Asi Al-Rahbani and Fairouz with Charles Aznavour, Beirut 1971

Asi Al-Rahbani and Fairouz with Charles Aznavour, Beirut 1971, source: Marina Faris, Pinterest, <https://www.pinterest.ch/pin/354306695697311567/>, 13. 02. 2023.



Figure 10: *Jebel Asswan* play (Fairouz, Brothers Rahbani), Baalbeck 1969.

Jebel Asswan, play (Fairouz, Brothers Rahbani), Baalbeck 1969, source: *Baalbeck, les riches heures du festival*, Beirut 1994.

7.6 Figures for chapter 5.3.1 (Ziad Al-Rahbani's popular avantgarde)



Figure 11: Ziad Al-Rahbani Live in De Doelen, Rotterdam 2019

Ziad Al-Rahbani, Live in De Doelen: A Tribute to Joe Sample, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 09. 03. 2019, source: *Al-Akhbar*, https://al-akhbar.com/Literature_Arts/268826, 01. 02. 2023.

8. Abstracts

8.1 Abstract der Masterarbeit in deutscher Sprache

Als Westeuropäer ist uns kaum bewusst, dass es in Ländern wie Syrien und dem Libanon, die seit langem von Krieg und Armut geplagt sind, ein einflussreiches, politisches Theater mit sehr alter Tradition gibt. Was wir jedoch wissen ist, dass seit 2015 viele Flüchtlinge auf europäischen Bühnen vorgeführt, als Spektakel eingesetzt werden, oder dazu bestimmt sind, unabhängig von Talent und Ausbildung, ständig sich selbst zu spielen.

Als Theaterwissenschaftlerin und jemand, der eng mit arabischen Theaterschaffenden in Wien zusammengearbeitet hat, wurde ich darauf aufmerksam, dass viele, auch junge migrantische Bühnenkünstler, immer noch starke Verbindungen zu ihrem heimischen Theater pflegen. Dieses Wissen ermutigte mich, die Geschichte des arabischen politischen Theaters, als Inspiration und Ursprung zeitgenössischer Theaterprojekte mit arabischen Elementen in Westeuropa zu untersuchen. Die vorliegende Arbeit testet die Kontinuitätsthese in der arabischen Theatralik und beleuchtet den Zusammenhang zwischen Vergangenheit und Gegenwart. Damit soll ein Bewusstsein geschaffen werden, für die kulturellen Wurzeln arabischer Künstler im deutschsprachigen Exil, und ein Kontext gebildet werden, der in der Rezeption ihrer Arbeit und dem sogenannten „Flüchtlingstheater“ völlig fehlt.

8.2 Abstract of the Master's Thesis in English

As western Europeans, we are hardly aware that in countries like Syria and Lebanon, which have been plagued by war and poverty, there is an influential, political theater with a very long tradition. What we do know however is that starting 2015, many refugees have been paraded on European stages or used as a spectacle, while others seem destined to continuously play themselves, regardless of their talent, training and education.

As a theater student and someone who worked closely with Arab theater and performance professionals in Vienna, it has come to my attention that many migrant stage artists, however young, still maintain strong ties to their native theater. This knowledge encouraged me to start investigating the history of Arabic political theater as an inspiration to, and origin of contemporary theatrical endeavors with Arabic elements in western Europe.

By testing the thesis of continuity in Arabic theatricality, and illuminating the link between the past and the present, this research aims to create an awareness of the cultural roots of Arab stage artists in German-speaking exile, thereby forming a context that is completely missing in the reception of their work, and what came to be known as “refugees’ theater”.

9. Sources

9.1 Monographs

Al-Maghout, Muhammad, *Joy is Not My Profession: Selected Poems of Muhammad al-Maghut*. Trans. John Asfour; Alison Burch, Montréal 1994.

Al-Wathiq, Muhammad, *A History of Arabic Drama: 1310-1914*, Khartoum 1990.

And, Metin, *A History of Theatre and Popular Entertainment in Turkey*, Ankara 1963.

_____, *Drama At The Crossroads: Turkish Performing Arts Link Past And Present, East And West*, Istanbul 1991.

_____, *Kasper – Karagöz - Karagiosis, Politisches Theater auf der Puppenbühne*, 1. Auf. Berlin 1985.

Badawi, M. M., *Early Arabic Drama*, Cambridge 1988.

_____, *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt*, New York 1987.

Beinin, Joel; Lockman, Zachary, *Workers on the Nile: nationalism, communism, Islam, and the Egyptian working class, 1882–1954*, Cairo 1998.

Bloch; Heimböckel; Tropper et al. (Hg.), *Theater und Ethnologie: Beiträge zu einer produktiven Beziehung*, Tübingen 2016.

Bosworth, C. E., *The Medieval Islamic Underworld. The Banū Sāsān in Arabic Society and Literature*, Leiden 1976.

Brockelmann, Carl, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, Suppl.bd. III, Leiden 1942.

Carlson, Marvin, *Speaking in Tongues: Languages at Play in the Theatre*, Michigan 2009.

Cormack, Raphael, *Midnight in Cairo: The Female Stars of Egypt's Roaring '20s*, London 2021.

Deck; Sieburg (Hg.), *Politisch Theater Machen: Neue Artikulationsformen des Politischen in den darstellenden Künsten*, Bielefeld 2011.

Dūrī, Abd al-‘Azīz, *The Historical Formation of the Arab Nation: A Study in Identity and Consciousness*, New York 1987.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika, *Semiotik des Theaters*, Bd. 1., Tübingen 1983.

_____, *Semiotik des Theaters*, Bd. 3., Tübingen 1983.

Gruber, Klemens, *Die zerstreute Avantgarde. Strategische Kommunikation im Italien der 70er Jahre*, Wien 1989, 2. Aufl. 2010, 75–100.

- Guo, Li, *Arabic Shadow Theatre, 1300-1900: A Handbook*, Leiden; Boston 2020.
- Hamdan, Mas'ud, *Poetics, Politics and Protest in Arab Theatre: The Bitter Cup and the Holy Rain*, East Sussex 2008.
- Hasan, Najat Essa, *Brecht-Rezeption im Irak, in Syrien und Ägypten seit den sechziger Jahren bis 2008*, Berlin 2010.
- Hermann, Rainer, *Kulturkrise und konservative Erneuerung. Muhammad Kurd Ali (1876–1953) und das geistige Leben in Damaskus zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt a. M. 1990.
- Hill, Peter, *Utopia and Civilization in the Arab Nahda*, Cambridge 2020.
- Hourani, Albert, *A History of the Arab People*, London 1991.
- Ibn al-Farid, *The Poem of the Way*, Chester Beatty Monographs No. 5, translated into English verse from the Arabic by A. J. Arberry, London 1952.
- Jacob, G., *Markttypen aus 'Agîb wa-Ġarîb*, Erlangen 1907.
- Jacob, Georg (Hg.), *Stücke aus Ibn Dānījāls Taif al-ḥajâl, für Vorlesungszwecke abgedruckt Einleitung*, 1. Heft, Ibn-Dāniyāl, Muḥammad, Erlangen 1910.
- _____, *Stücke aus Ibn Dānījāls Taif al-ḥajâl, Die Eröffnungsszene aus 'Agîb wa-Ġarîb* - [Brock S II, 2] Ibn-Dāniyāl, Muḥammad, Berlin 1912.
- Kahle, Paul, Hopwood, Derek (Ed.), *Three Shadow Plays by Ibn Daniyal* (bilingual edition), Cambridge 1992.
- Landau, Jacob M., *Studies in the Arab Theater and Cinema*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1958.
- Lane, Edward, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, New York 2005.
- Martinovich, Nikolai N., *The Turkish Theatre*, New York 1933.
- Mestyan, Adam, *Arab Patriotism, The Ideology and Culture of Power in Late Ottoman Egypt*, Princeton 2017.
- Milich; Pannewick; Tramontini (Ed.), *Conflicting Narratives: War, Trauma and Memory in Iraqi Culture*, Wiesbaden 2012.
- Moreh, Shmuel, *Live Theatre and Dramatic Literature in the Medieval Arabic World*, Edinburgh 1992.
- Niessen, Carl, *Handbuch der Theater-Wissenschaft*, Bd. I, Lechte/Emsdetten, 1958.

Pannewick, Friederike, *Das Wagnis Tradition: Arabische Wege Der Theatralität, Literaturen Im Kontext*; 2. Wiesbaden 2000.

Petrocelli, Paolo, *The Evolution of Opera Theatre in the Middle East and North Africa*, Cambridge 2019.

Philipp, Thomas, *The Syrians in Egypt, 1725–1975. Berliner Islamstudien, Band III*, Stuttgart 1985.

Philipp, Thomas; Schaebler, Birgit (Ed.), *The Syrian Land: Processes of Integration and Fragmentation: Bilād Al-Shām from the 18th to the 20th Century*, Stuttgart 1998.

Runciman, Steven, *A History of the Crusades, Volume II: The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East*, Cambridge 1952.

Sadgrove, Philip, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century: 1799-1882*, Reading 1996.

Salloukh, Tarek, *Theater in Lebanon: Production, Reception and Confessionalism*, Bielefeld 2015.

Sellers-Young, Barbara, *Belly Dance, Pilgrimage and Identity*, London 2016.

Stone, Christopher, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon: The Fairouz and Rahbani Nation*, New York 2007.

Van Nieuwkerk, Karin, *A Trade Like Any Other: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt*, Texas 1995.

Wannous, Sa'dallah, *Sentenced to Hope, A Sa'dallah Wannous Reader*, trans. Robert Myers and Nada Saab, New Haven, CT 2019.

Weismann, Zachs, et al (Ed.), *Ottoman Reform and Muslim Regeneration*, London 2005.

Welsford, Enid, *The fool; his social and literary history*, New York 1968.

Woidich; Landau (Ed., trans.), *Arabisches Volkstheater in Kairo im Jahre 1909: Ahmad ilFar und seine Schwänke*, Beirut: in Kommission bei Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart 1993.

Ze'evi, Dror, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500–1900*, Berkeley 2006.

Ziter, Edward, *Political Performance in Syria: From the Six-Day War to the Syrian Uprising*, New York & London 2015.

Monographs (Arabic)

Abu Murad, Nabil, *al-akhawan Rahbani: hayat wa-masrah*, (The Brothers Rahbani, Life and Theater), Beirut 1990.

Abu Shanab, Adil, “Hayat Abi Halil al-Qabbani” (The Life of Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani), in: *al-mauqif al-adabi*, 89, Damascus 1978.

Al-Baroudi, Fakhri. *mudhakkaraat al-Baaroudi* (Al-Baaroudi’s Memoirs), Beirut and Damascus 1951.

Al-Bahra, Nasr ud-Deen. *ahaadeeth wa tajaarib masrahiyya* (Theatrical Discussions and Experiences), Damascus 1977.

Al-Rai, Ali, *al-masrah fil-watanil-arabi* (Theater in the Arabic World), Kuwait 1999.

El Shennawi, Tarek, *zaman taheyya kariokka* (The Times of Tahiya Carioca), Cairo 2017.

Ghunaim, Ghassan, *al-masrah alsiyasi fi suriya* (Political Theater in Syria), Damascus 1996.

Hamwi, Hussein, *al itijah al qawmi fi masrah adnan mardam al shi’ri* (National Tendencies in Adnān Mardam’s Verse Play), Damascus 1999.

Ibn al-Muqaffa’ (Ed.), *Alf laila wa laila* (Thousand and One Nights), Bulaq, Cairo 1935.

Ismail, Saed Ali, *masirat al masrah fi misr 1900-1935* (History of Theater in Egypt 1900-1935), Cairo 2003; Windsor 2018.

_____, *tarikh al masrah fil ’alam al ’arabi* (History of Theater in the Arabic World), Windsor 2012.

_____, *juhoud al qabbani al masrahiya fi misr* (Al-Qabbani’s Theatrical Endeavors in Egypt), Windsor 2017.

Ismat, Riad, *šaytānul-masrah* (The Theater Devil), Damascus 1987.

Khalaf, Taissier, *min Dimashq ila Chicago, rihlat Abi Khalil al Qabbani ila America 1893* (From Damascus to Chicago, Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani’s Journey to America 1893), Beirut 2018.

_____, *nash’at al masrah fi biladisham 1847-1917* (The Birth of Theater in the Levant 1847–1917), Sharjah 2018.

Nagm, Muhammad Yusuf, *al-Masrahiya fi al-adab al-arabi al-hadith* (Theater Play in Modern Arabic Literature), Beirut 1956.

Wannous, Saadallah, *haflat samar min ajl khamsa huzairan* (Soirée for the Fifth of June), Beirut 1980.

_____, *mughamarat ra’s al mamluk jabir* (The Adventure of the Slave Jabir’s Head), Beirut 1989.

_____, *al a’mal al kamila* (The Complete Works), Damascus 1996.

Ursan, Ali Uqla, *al-mazahir al-masrahiya inda l- arab* (Theatrical Phenomena of the Arabs). Damascus 1985.

Ziad Rahbani, *bi-al-nisba li-bukra shu* (What Do We Do Tomorrow?), Beirut 1994a.

_____, *film Amirki tawil* (A Long American Film), Beirut 1994b.

_____, *nazl al-surur* (Pleasure Hotel), Beirut 1994c.

_____, *shi fashil* (A Failure), Beirut 1994d.

9.2 Anthologies

Allen, Roger; Jayyusi, Salma Khadra (Ed.), *Modern Arabic Drama: An Anthology*, trans. Muhammad Mustafa Badawi, *Bloomington*, Indiana 1995.

Rubin, Don; Al-Maleh, Ghassan et al. (Ed.), *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre. (Arab world) Vol. 4*, New York 2003.

9.3 Articles and essays

Adwan, Ziad, "Imaginary Theatre: Professionalising Theatre in the Levant 1940-1990", *Journal of Global Theatre History* 3/1, 2019, 1–19.

_____, "The place of intellectuals: The Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus between dictatorship and the market", *Journal of Global Theatre History* 4/1, 2020, 37–54.

Al-Abdullah, Abdulaziz, "The Politicisation of Arab Theatre: Sa'd Allah Wannus", *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 10, 2013, 663–668.

Allen, Roger, "Drama" in: *Introduction to Arabic Literature*, New York 2000, 193–215.

Al-Rai, Ali, "Some Aspects of Modern Arabic Drama" in: R.C. Ostle (Ed.): *Studies in Modern Arabic Literature*, Warminster 1975, 174.

Alsaleh; Wannūs, "Approaching Sa'dallāh Wannūs's Drama: The Manifestos for a New Arab Theater", *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 39, 2019, 190–227.

Araudaki, Badr ad-Dīn, "at-Tagriba al-masrahiya fi Suriya" (the Syrian Theater Experience) in: *Al-Mauqif al-adabi*, 1, Damascus 1972.

Badawi, M. M., "Medieval Arabic Drama: Ibn Dāniyāl", *Journal of Arabic Literature* 13, 1982, 83–107. (repr. As introduction to P. Kahle, *Three shadow plays*).

Beeman, William O., "Theater in the Middle East" in: Martin Banham, (Ed.), *Cambridge Guide to World Theatre*, Cambridge 1988, 664–676.

Bešková, Katarína, "Sa'dallāh Wannūs and the theatre of politicization", *Asian and African Studies* 24/2, 2015, 211–232.

Bešková, Katarína, "The Thousand and One Nights as a Source for Sa'dallāh Wannūs's Play The King is the King", *Archiv Orientální*, 85(2), 2017, 191–192.

Bock, Sheila; Borland, Katherine, "Exotic Identities: Dance, Difference, and Self-fashioning", in: *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 48, No. 1, January/April, 2011, 1–36.

Cachia, Pierre. "Idealism and Ideology: The Case of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 100/3, 7–11/1980, 225–235.

Carlson, Marvin, "Theatre Festivals in the Arab World", *Contemporary Theatre Review* 13/4, 2003, 42–47.

_____, "Avant-Garde Drama in the Middle East" in: Harding; Rouse (Ed.), *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance*, Michigan 2010, 125–144.

_____, "The Arab Aristophanes", *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 47: Iss. 2, 2013, 151–282.

_____, "Negotiating theatrical modernism in the arab world", *Theatre Journal*, 65(4), 2013, 523–535.

Elisseeff, N., "Nur al-Din Mahmud b. Zanki" in: Bosworth, C. E. et al. (Eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition, Volume VIII*, Ned-Sam, Leiden 1995.

Fahmy, Ziad, "Francophone Egyptian Nationalists, Anti-British Discourse, and European Public Opinion, 1885-1910: The Case of Mustafa Kamil and Ya'qub Sannu", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and The Middle East* 28/1, 2008, 170–183.

Gouryh, Admer, "The Fictional World of Walid Ikhlasī", *World Literature Today* 58/1, Winter 1984, 23–27.

_____, "The Sociopolitical and Cultural Ambience of Walid Ikhlasī's Drama", *World Literature Today* 62/1, 1988, 50–55.

Guo, Li, "Paradise Lost: Ibn Daniyal's Response to Baybars' Campaign against Vice in Cairo", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 121.2.2001, 219–235.

Hafez, Sabry, "Arab Political Issues in Contemporary English Theater", *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 39, 2019.

Hamadah, Faisal Adel, "Travelling Theatre: Saadallah Wannous's Journeys between the Local and the International", *Theatre Research International* 43/3, 2018, 305–17.

Hammond, Andrew, "Arab Theater: The Struggle for High Culture" in: *Popular Culture in the Arab World: Arts, Politics, and the Media*, Cairo 2007, 263–280.

Haugbølle, Sune, "Ziad al-Rahbani and the Liberal Subject" in: Hatina M., Schumann C. (Ed.), *Arab Liberal Thought after 1967*, New York 2015, 177–194.

Hont, Istvan, "The early Enlightenment debate on commerce and Luxury" in: Goldie, Mark; Wokler, Robert (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, Cambridge 2008, 413–414.

Hopwood, D., “From the shadow plays of Ibn Daniyal to the poetry of Philip Larkin: Mustafa Badawi as editor and translator” in: R. Allen and R. Ostle (Eds.), *Studying modern Arabic literature: Mustafa Badawi, scholar and critic*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; 1st edition (April 14, 2015).

Kahle, Paul, “Marketszene aus einem egyptischen Schattenspiel” in: *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 27 (1912), 92–102.

_____, “The Arabic Shadow Play in Egypt” in: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (JRAS)*, 1940, 21–34.

Karachouli, Regina, “Abu Halil Al-Qabbānī (1833-1902)- Damaszener Theatergründer und Prinzipal”, *Die Welt des Islams* 32/1, 1992, 83–98.

Littmann, Enno, “Ein arabisches Karagöz-spiel” in: *ZDMG*, 54, 1900, 661–80.

Moosa, Matti, “Naqqāsh and the Rise of the Native Arab Theatre in Syria”, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 3, 1972, 106–117.

Moreh, Shmuel, “The Shadow Play (“Khayal al-Zill”) in the Light of Arabic Literature” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 18 (1987): 46–61.

Müller, Lothar, “Das arabische Zwischenreich” in: *Weißer Magie: Die Epoche des Papiers*, München 2012, 19–27.

Myers, Robert; Saab, Nada, “Revolutionary Theatre of the Absurd from the Arab World”, *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 37/1, 2015, 94–96.

Provence, Michael, “Late Ottoman State Education” in: J. Rgen Nielsen; Jørgen S. Nielsen, *Religion, Ethnicity and Contested Nationhood in the Former Ottoman Space*, Leiden; Boston 2012, 117.

Sadgrove, Philip, “Ahmad Abū Khalīl al-Qabbānī” in: Roger Allen (Ed.), *Essays in Arabic literary biography* 3, 1850–1950, Wiesbaden 2010.

Said, Edward, “Homage to a Belly-Dancer: On Tahia Carioca” in: *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Cambridge 2000, 346–55.

Salloum, Habeeb, “Sayyed Darwish: The Father Of Modern Arab Music”, *Al Jadid, A Review and Record of Arab Culture and Arts*, Vol. 7, No. 36, 2001.

Shay, Anthony; Sellers-Young, Barbara, “Belly Dance: Orientalism: Exoticism: Self-Exoticism” in: *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 1, Summer, 2003, 13-37.

Sibley, Emily, “Redefining Theater: Yusuf Idris’s ‘al-Farāfīr’ and the Work of Cultural Decolonization”, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 39, 2019, 31–62.

Starr, Deborah A., “In Bed Together: Coexistence in Togo Mizrahi’s Alexandria Films” in:

Rebecca Bryant (Ed.), *Post-Ottoman Coexistence, Sharing Space in the Shadow of Conflict*, New York 2016, 129–156.

Toorawa, Shawkat M., “A translation of Sahrah m'a Abi Khalil al-Qabbani by Sa'dallah Wannūs”, *Arabic & Middle Eastern Literature* 3/1, 19–49.

Tramontini, Leslie; Milich, Stephan, “Writing against Injustice and Oppression. On the Literary Commitment of Muẓaffar al-Nawwāb and Muḥammad al-Māghūṭ”, *Al-Abhath* 62-63 (2014–2015), 103–133.

Ullrich, Peter, “Zwischen Damaskus und Palmyra: Streiflichter vom syrischen Theater”, *Theater der Zeit* 38, 1983, 40–53.

Wannous, Sadallah, “Bayanat li-masrah arabi gadid” (Manifestos for a new Arabic theater) in: *al-Maarifa*, Damaskus, 104, 1970, 18.

_____, “Limada waqafat ar-ragiya didd Abi Halil al-Qabbani?” in: *Bayanat li masrah arabi gadid* (Manifests for a new Arabic Theater). Beirut: 1988 (1970¹ in: *Al-Ma'rifa* Nr. 104), 59–77.

Youssef, Magdi, “Brecht’s Theatre and Social Change in Egypt (1954–71)”, *Arab Stages* 1/1, 2014, 3–10.

Zargar, Cyrus Ali, “The Satiric Method of Ibn Dāniyāl: Morality and Anti-Morality in ‘Ṭayf Al-Khayāl’”, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37/1, 2006, 68–108.

9.4 Theses

Abdulla, Abdulaziz H., “Western influences on the theatre of the Syrian playwright Sa'd Allāh Wannūs”, Dissertation, University of Manchester, Department of Middle Eastern Studies 1993.

Abed Lateef, Ayad, “Entstehung des arabischen Theaters und Rezeption des deutschen Theaters im arabischen Raum (Ägypten, Syrien, Libanon und Irak)”, Dissertation, Europa-Universität Flensburg, Institut für Sprache, Literatur und Medien 2017.

Al-Anezi, Ali Ajil Naji, “An Analytical Study of the Theatre of the Syrian Playwright Saadallah Wannous, with Particular Emphasis on the Plays Written After the 1967 War”, Dissertation, The University of Sheffield, Department of English Literature 2006.

Buturović, Amila, “Sociology of popular drama in medieval Egypt: Ibn Dāniyāl and his shadow plays”, Dissertation, McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies 1993.

Haffar, Nabil, “Die Rezeption Brechts in Syrien in den sechziger und siebziger Jahren unseres Jahrhunderts”, Dissertation, masch., Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Theaterwissenschaften 1987.

9.5 Film

Les Amants du Pont-Neuf, R.: Leos Carax, FR 1991.

9.6 Compact disc

Ziad Al-Rahbani, (1993a) *The American Motion Picture* by Ziad Rahbani: Complete Original Cast Recording of the Popular Musical Play. 3 records, performed by Z. Rahbani, J. Saqr, S. Hawwat, Z. Abu 'Absi, et al., produced by A.J. Samaha, Beirut: Voice of Beirut, VOBCD 523–5.

_____, (1993b) *L'auberge du bonheur* by Ziad Rahbani: Complete Original Cast Recording of the Popular Musical Play, 2 records, performed by Z. Rahbani, J. Saqr, et al., produced by A. Chahine and Fils, Beirut: Voix de l'Orient Series, VDLCD 558–9.

_____, (1993c) *Failure . . .* Complete Original Cast Recording by Ziad Rahbani. 2 records, performed by Z. Rahbani, J. Saqr, Z. Abu 'Absi, M. Sa'idun, et al., produced by A. Samaha, Beirut: Voice of Beirut, VOBCD 526–7.

9.7 Online sources

'Abduh al-Ḥāmūlī, Foundation for Arab Music Archiving and Research (AMAR), <https://www.amar-foundation.org/abduh-al-hamuli/>, 25. 11. 2022.

Allen, Roger, "Arabic Literature: Drama", Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Arabic-literature/Drama>, 02. 12. 2022.

Al-Sajer, Fawaz, *sahra ma' abu khalil al qabbani*, The Higher Institute for Dramatic Arts, programme sheet, Damascus, 1981, the HIDA archive online: https://hidaarchive.com/album/17/single_photo/642, 03. 01. 2023.

Al-Samman, Eyad N., "Mohammed Al-Maghout, the Syrian Poet with a Satiric Pen", Arab World Books, 2009, <https://www.arabworldbooks.com/en/e-zine/mohammed-al-maghout-the-syrian-poet-with-a-satiric-pen>, 02. 12. 2022.

Badia Masabni in interview with Laila Rustom, 1966, Hani Jordan's video archive, Youtube, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DiDVScUkPHk&ab_channel=haniJordan%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9, 13. 12. 2022.

Bennesbe la boukra shu (What Do We Do Tomorrow?), 1978, written and directed by Ziad Al-Rahbani, starring Joseph Saqr, Nabila Zeitouni, Samy Hawwat, 01:12:35, Youtube, Ovex, 2020, <https://youtu.be/bQQbNYygvbg?t=4355>, 12. 02. 2023.

Cormack, Raphael, "Life was a cabaret – the Roaring Twenties in Cairo", *Apollo, the international art magazine*, January, 2020, <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/roaring-twenties-cairo/>, 03. 12. 2022.

Cuninghame, Patrick, "'A laughter that will bury you all'": Irony as protest and language as struggle in the Italian 1977 movement", *Libcom.org*, 2012,

<https://libcom.org/history/laughter-will-bury-you-all-irony-protest-language-struggle-italian-1977-movement-1>, 27. 01. 2023.

Dalida, biographie, available at: <https://dalida.com/biographie/son-histoire.html>, 13. 11. 2022.

“Farewell to Egypt’s Queen of Dance”, BBC NEWS, Middle East, 1999; http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/454010.stm, 07. 12. 2022.

Day‘at tishreen (October Village), 1974, Duraid Lahham’s official youtube channel, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w95fq2VJZkQ>, 03. 02. 2023.

Dowara, Amr, “Mariam Summat, Milia Dian’s fierce rival”, *Masrahuna* (weekly cultural magazine of the Egyptian General Organization of Culture Palaces), available at: <https://www.gocp.gov.eg/masr7na/articles.aspx?ArticleID=22818>, 16. 11. 2022.

Gharib, Ashraf, “Remembering Tahia Karioka: A little bit of belly-dancing and a whole lot of acting”, Ahram online, 2017, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/32/278122/Arts—Culture/Film/Remembering-Tahia-Karioka-A-little-bit-of-bellydan.aspx>, 13. 12. 2022.

Ghurba (Expatriation), 1975, Duraid Lahham’s official youtube channel, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BFLJphTuQ>. 03. 02. 2023.

James, Barry, “Sadat killing seen to fit pattern: Random and isolated”, United Press International, 1981, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1981/10/10/Sadat-killing-seen-to-fit-pattern-Random-and-isolated/7155371534400/>, 13. 12. 2022.

Kanaan, Wissam, “Tears of the Pantomime”, *Al-Akhbar*, 2015, https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_People/109575, 15. 01. 2023.

Karawya, Fairouz “*awalem am mutribat?*” (Divas or Courtesans?), Mada Masr, 2022, <https://mada33.appspot.com/www.madamasr.com/ar/2022/11/26/feature/%D8%AB%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A9/%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A3%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%9F/?fbclid=IwAR3rKCeREvSO-Ih071rq0wd41Bfg3X55RCfFX9KjrrIkCknr-wQ1ReA5c84>, 02. 12. 2022.

Kasak ya watan (Cheers Homeland), 1979, Duraid Lahham’s official youtube channel, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ue—9uBd_M0, 03. 02. 2023.

Khoury, Stéphanie, “Badia Masabni, the fallen queen of belly dancing”, L'Orient-Le Jour, 2022. <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1309028/badia-masabni-the-fallen-queen-of-belly-dancing.html>, 05. 12. 2022.

Mansour, Maher, “Omar Hajjo, Founder and Witness”, The New Arab, 2015, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%B1-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D9%91%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B3%D9%91%D8%B3-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF>, 02.01.2023.

Mays Al Reem (play) 1975 by Asi and Mansour Al-Rahbani, directed by Antoine Remy,

starring Fairouz, Nasri Shamseddine, Hoda Haddad, Joseph Saqr, video excerpt available at: https://m.facebook.com/11fadi11/videos/%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A-%D9%A1%D9%A9%D9%A7%D9%A5/2183948398509952/?video_source=permalink&locale=zh_CN, 12. 02. 2023.

“Munīra al-Mahdiyya (1884-1965)”, AMAR (Foundation for Arab Music Archiving & Research), <https://www.amar-foundation.org/munira-al-mahdiyya/>, 02. 12. 2022.

Mounira El Mahdeya in interview with Amani Nashed, 1963, Maspero Zaman, Youtube, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIcnHiOuW1I&ab_channel=MasperoZaman-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86, 04. 02. 2022.

Qushha, Nidal, “Nihad Qalei, Founder of the Syrian National Theater”, *Al-Arab*, issue 11598, 2020, <https://alarab.co.uk/%D9%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%82%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AF-%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9>, 02. 01. 2023.

Shaaban, A., “Political cabaret, from Fayez Halawa to Ahmad Beder”, *Rose al-Yousef*. Arabic weekly political magazine, 2020. available at: <https://goldenbook.rosaelyoussef.com/5035/%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%85-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B9>, 13.12.2022.

Shaq‘iq al nu‘man (Poppies), 1983, Duraid Lahham’s official youtube channel, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJUZ2c3pUDQ>, 03.02.2023.

Soudani, Fadel, “Arabic and Islamic Shadow Theater”, Modern Discussion, 2.6.2007, <https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=100858>, 27. 11. 2022.

Stéphane Rosti (biography), available at: https://www.bibalex.org/alexcinema/actors/stephane_rosti.html, 13. 11. 2022.

Subin, Anna Della; Omar, Hussein, “First As Shadow, Then As Farce: An Evening with Medieval Puppeteer Ibn Daniyal”, *Arablit & Arablit Quarterly*, April 22, 2013, <https://arablit.org/2013/04/22/first-as-shadow-then-as-farce-an-evening-with-medieval-puppeteer-ibn-daniyal/>, 02. 12. 2022.

The Lovers on the Bridge Soundtrack Credit, IMDB, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0101318/soundtrack/?ref_=tt_trv_snd, 03. 01. 2023.

Voltaire, “Le Mondain (1736)”, available at: https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Le_Mondain. 15. 02. 2023.

9.8 Photo sources and credits

Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani (1835–1902), Father of Syrian Theater, source: Taissier Khalaf, *min dimashq ila chicago, rihlat abi khalil al qabbani ila america 1893* (From Damascus to Chicago, Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani's Journey to America 1893), Beirut 2018, 173.

Damascus Palace in Midway Plaisance 1893, Chicago World's Fair (World's Columbian Exposition, May 1, 1893–October 30, 1893), source: Taissier Khalaf, *min dimashq ila chicago, rihlat abi khalil al qabbani ila america 1893* (From Damascus to Chicago, Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani's Journey to America 1893), Beirut 2018, 181. Courtesy of The Benjamin Ives Gilman Collection Recorded at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University.

Théâtre Zizinia, La Scala of Alexandria, source: Paolo Petrocelli, "The origins of opera houses in Egypt", Jun 6, 2020, <https://medium.com/@paolopetrocelli/the-origins-of-opera-houses-in-egypt-36a49eb01db5>, 12. 02. 2023.

Esthera (Tirah) Al Hakim, Chicago World's Fair (World's Columbian Exposition, May 1, 1893–October 30, 1893), source: Taissier Khalaf, *min dimashq ila chicago, rihlat abi khalil al qabbani ila america 1893* (From Damascus to Chicago, Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani's Journey to America 1893), Beirut 2018, 182. Courtesy of The Benjamin Ives Gilman Collection Recorded at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University.

Munira El Mahdeya with musicians Zakaria Ahmed and Mohamed El Qasabgi c. 1915, source: Karawya, Fairouz "awalem am mutribat?" (Divas or Courtesans?), Mada Masr, 2022, <https://mada33.appspot.com/www.madamasr.com/ar/2022/11/26/feature/%D8%AB%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A9/%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A3%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%9F/?fbclid=IwAR3rKCeREvSO-Ih071rq0wd41Bfg3X55RCfFX9KjrrIkCknr-wQ1ReA5c84>, 02. 12. 2022.

Artist and show-business woman Badia Masabni as an odalisque, Cairo, 1960, source: *Arab Week* magazine, Beirut, Abboudi Bou Jawde collection. (Credit: Abboudi Bou Jawde photo via the Arab World Institute), source: Khouri, Stéphanie, "Badia Masabni, the fallen queen of belly dancing", L'Orient-Le Jour, 2022, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1309028/badia-masabni-the-fallen-queen-of-belly-dancing.html>, 05. 12. 2022.

Actress and belly dancer Tahiya Carioca c. 1935, source: <https://alchetron.com/Taheyya-Kariokka#taheyya-kariokka-42091f48-bfa5-4214-a429-0604cd477d1-resize-750.jpeg>, 13. 01. 2023.

Usrat Tishreen (October Troupe) in *Ghurba* (Expatriation), Damascus 1975, source: Mansour, Maher, "Omar Hajjo, al mu'assis wal shahid" ("Omar Hajjo, Founder and Witness"), The New Arab, 2015, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%B1-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D9%91%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B3%D9%91%D8%B3-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF>, 12. 02. 2023.

Asi Al-Rahbani and Fairouz with Charles Aznavour, Beirut 1971, source: Marina Faris, Pinterest, <https://www.pinterest.ch/pin/354306695697311567/>, 13. 02. 2023.

Jebal Asswan, play (Fairuz, Brothers Rahbani), Baalbeck 1969, source: *Baalbeck, les riches heures du festival*, Beirut 1994.

Ziad Al-Rahbani Live in De Doelen: A Tribute to Joe Sample, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 9.3.2019, source: *Al-Akhbar*, https://al-akhbar.com/Literature_Arts/268826 01. 02. 2023.